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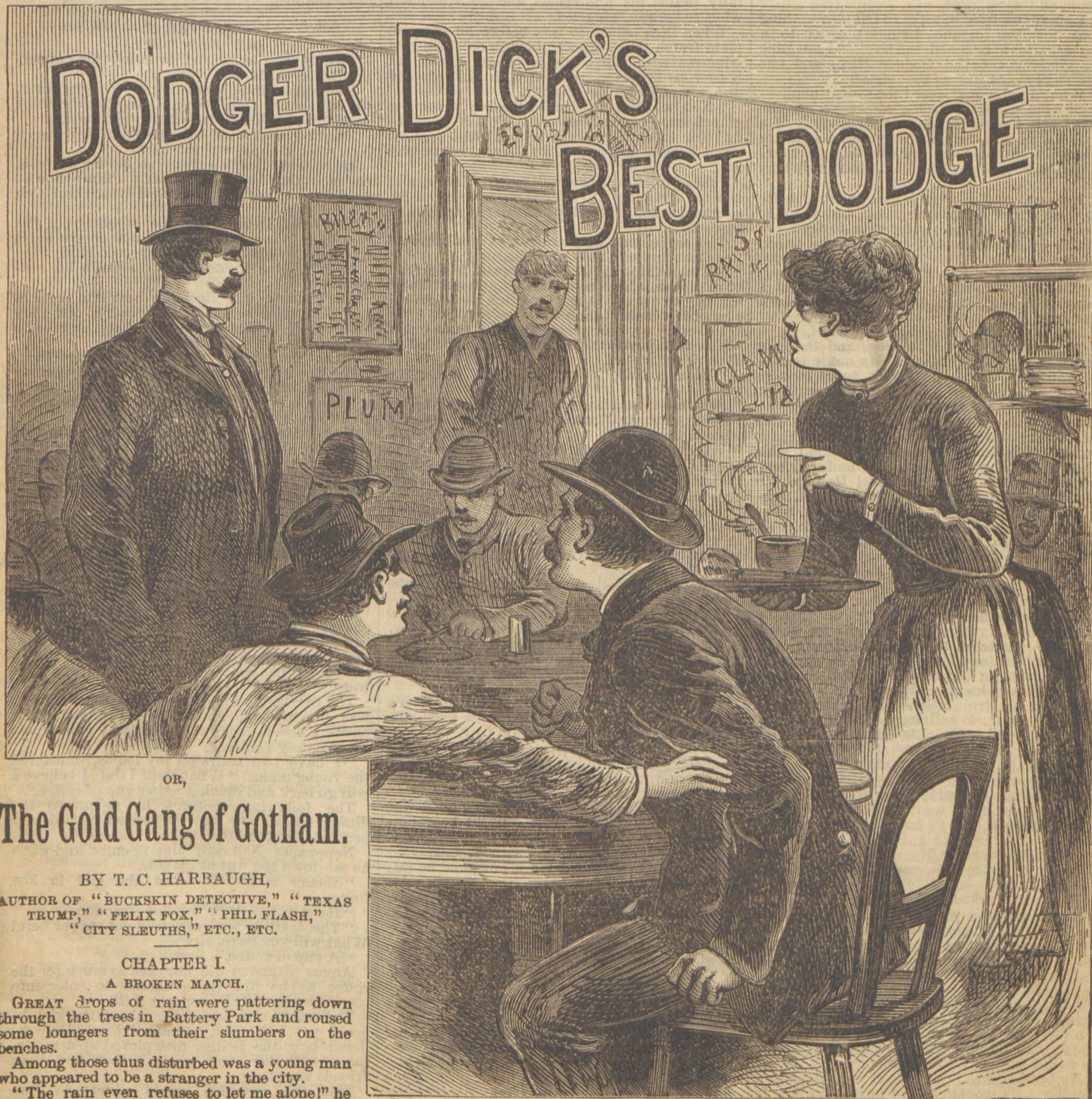
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OR,

The Gold Gang of Gotham.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,
AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "TEXAS
TRUMP," "FELIX FOX," "PHIL FLASH,"
"CITY SLEUTHS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BROKEN MATCH.

GREAT drops of rain were pattering down through the trees in Battery Park and roused some loungers from their slumbers on the benches.

Among those thus disturbed was a young man who appeared to be a stranger in the city.

"The rain even refuses to let me alone!" he exclaimed with bitterness, "I guess there's only one thing left."

"THAT IS THE MAN WHO WATCHED ME," WHISPERED THE GIRL TO DICK,
LOSING SOME COLOR.

"I say, mister, could you give a fellow a match?" rung out a cheery voice at this moment and the young man was confronted by a boy who held a delicate cigar between his weather-browned fingers.

"A match is it? I guess you might as well have asked me for a thousand dollars."

"Busted, eh?"

The lounge was going through his pockets for the match, and the boy who was rather good-looking and sharp eyed, was watching him with a good deal of curiosity.

At last, from one corner of the last pocket searched, a broken match was produced.

"Is that the lay-out?" asked the urchin with a surprised grin.

"That is the last of a fortune," was the sad rejoinder.

"Jewhilkens! you don't remark that, do you?"

"Gospel was never truer."

The boy came closer, and the humor, until then visible in his eyes, gradually faded out.

He was interested.

A summer day had just gone, and a night, threatenful with storm, was closing around New York. The lamps on the Battery had been lighted, and the rain which had increased could be seen on their glasses.

"I guess you wouldn't like to tell me anything about how the fortune dwindled away to a broken match?" resumed the boy. "I am Dick Sly, sometimes called Dodger Dick, and one name suits me as well as the other."

"What do you do?" asked the young man.

"Oh, I'm a wharf Jack-o'-all-trades. Sometimes I help the cops when they want work of a particular nature done, and sometimes I do little jobs for Mother Sturgeon who took me when my real mother died. You don't seem to b'long to New York?"

"I do not and I wish I had never seen the city," answered the young man, and then he looked through the pattering rain toward the waters of the bay, and the boy saw his hands shut as if impelled by some powerful resolution.

"I don't see why I should tell you my story," he went on, returning to Dodger Dick. "But I need not keep it back, for the telling cannot harm me."

"Just as you like," the boy remarked.

"Oh, well, it won't take long, and the rain won't hurt us under this tree. My name is Angus Brandon. I came to this city three months ago to enter a business house owned, in part, by an uncle. I had a fortune, not very large, but still a fortune, coming to me, but I wanted to lead a business life. I was not here long when I became acquainted with a young man who called himself Elroy Surface. He had a friend considerably older, named Daniel Despard. I met them accidentally in this very Park, one day after business hours. I can see now that, on their part, the encounter was not so accidental. I rather liked young Surface, but Despard never obtained my confidence. I was thrown much into the young man's company; we took in the city together, meeting here and there his friends. Step by step, although I knew it not, I was drawn deeper into the net.

"One night I went back to the store, how I know not. I entered the private office, opened the safe, and showed Elroy Surface its contents. The next morning the firm discovered that ten thousand dollars had been taken. They put detectives on the trail, and I was suddenly confronted by my uncle and charged with burglary. What could I say? The safe held certain papers of mine worth the amount taken from the drawers. I threw them at my relative's feet, and they were accepted. I was driven from the house. Shelter was refused me under his roof from that hour, and I went forth to be watched by sleepless eyes, and to know no peace of soul. After my disgrace Elroy Surface and Daniel Despard disappeared. My uncle dismissed his detectives, but some-how-or-other I have been bled ever since."

"By whom?" asked Dodger Dick.

"Sometimes by a woman, at other times by a man. I found employment further up town, but the leeches found me, and I had to buy their silence. What is the use of fighting a fate like this, Dodger Dick?" cried Brandon. "I would rise and retrieve the past, but the accursed toils the two villains threw about me render it impossible. The black-mailers have let me alone for a few days, for I have been penniless, and some of these benches have been my bed. Don't you wish I had not told my story?"

"No," exclaimed the wharf spy detective promptly. "I wouldn't have missed hearing it for a good deal. You haven't thought of anything desperate, I hope?"

Again the look toward the water that broke, lamp-lit, against the pier.

"You need not mind answering me!" cried Dick, interpreting the glance. "Let us get away from here."

The young man gave the boy a look of curiosity.

"I've faced rain before," he remarked with a smile.

"So have I. I've slept in it on the wharves; but, that is neither here nor there. We'll go and get our supper."

"To Mother Sturgeon's, as you call her?" asked Brandon.

"No, at Nell's boarding house."

"Who is Nell?"

"You shall see."

Angus Brandon put in no remonstrance, but signified his willingness to follow the boy.

"I might as well have another square meal," he murmured. "I don't intend to throw myself on the charity of this boy. I'm at the end of the string, and the world has no further use for Angus Brandon."

Dodger Dick led the young man rapidly through the Park and into the net-work of gas-lit streets beyond.

Brandon more than once had occasion to mentally praise his nimbleness, and he wondered whether he was being led.

When Dick halted, it was before an old and plain frame, five stories high, with old-fashioned windows with many broken panes. Loud and boisterous laughter, mingled with the rattle of dishes came from the interior.

"Nell boards here," smiled the boy, casting a glance into Brandon's face. "We'll be likely to find her in at this moment, too. Ah! here we are. Nobody will know you, sir, so come with me."

Dodger Dick led the way into the house, and ushered Brandon into a large room occupied by several tables, at which people were disposing of supper.

The scene was animating, and the boarders were not choice in attire nor language.

Without stopping, Dick continued to the end of the room, where he found a stand just large enough for two. He and Brandon took possession of the chairs which were unoccupied.

Presently a young girl of eighteen came out of the kitchen beyond with a tray, and nodded to Dick as she passed.

"That is Nell," whispered Dick across the table.

Brandon fixed his eyes on the girl, who had a willowy figure, a graceful step, and a sweetly winning face.

When she came back Dodger Dick motioned to her and introduced Brandon, adding with a smile that they would like to have two of the best suppers the house could afford.

"She'll do a little extra for us," laughed the Dodger. "Newspaper Nell is worth her weight in gold, and my figures run her up to about twenty-five thousand dollars. Whew! think of that, Mr. Brandon!"

"Newspaper Nell you call her?" observed the young man.

"Yes. She sells the early afternoon papers, and turns many an honest penny in that way. After her stock is sold she gets her supper here for waiting on the table. Ah! here she comes with a booming supper, just what we want, eh, Mr. Brandon?"

The next moment the girl set her tray on a round stool near by and began to place the various dishes before the waiting pair.

While engaged at this she leaned toward Dodger Dick, and said in low tones:

"I was watched again to-day and by the same man."

"I wish I had seen him," exclaimed the Dodger, flushing indignantly. "Did he follow you, Nell?"

"Not far," replied the girl with a smile. "I gave him the slip, as I know how, and he was left in the lurch, ha, ha!"

"I'll be around to-morrow. Maybe he'll show up again," spoke Dick. "I want to see this fellow, Nelly."

At this moment the door down the room opened, and a man came in.

"Great Jove!" cried Brandon. "Yonder is Dan Despard at last!"

Dodger Dick looked at the new-comer, and so did Newspaper Nell.

"That is the man who watched me," whispered the girl to Dick, losing some color.

"He is the villain to whom I owe my ruin!" added Brandon, with eyes in a blaze, pushing his chair back. "I always said that I would pay him back on sight, and now—"

"Not here, Mr. Brandon. I won't have it!"

and Dodger Dick caught the young man's wrist before he could leave his seat. "Let that fellow have all the rope he wants while he remains here. If he is Dan Despard, and the person who has been watching Nell, I will say that I have been tracking him for ten days, and for a crime that will rid New York of his presence. He came here for a purpose; let us wait and see what it is. Eat your supper, Mr. Brandon. I am going to enjoy mine if the man I've been looking for is within twenty feet of me. Daniel Despard, eh? I wonder how many names he has had in his lifetime?"

By this time the man who had come had found a seat at the table, and Newspaper Nell immediately took his order.

How his keen black eyes watched the girl as she moved off, and with what impatience they regarded the door till she reappeared with his supper.

Angus Brandon threw furtive glances at the man.

"I wonder what's become of his partner, Elroy Surface? I want to live now! I intend to get even with those two city tigers, and this boy detective, Dodger Dick will help me."

At that very moment, strange to say, the thoughts of the Dodger were following in the same channel.

CHAPTER II.

OLD FOES MEET.

THE Dodger appeared to enjoy his supper, but Brandon did not.

He was continually sending furtive glances at the man called Dan Despard, and those glances were full of hate and threatened retribution.

Despard never took his eyes from Newspaper Nell when the girl was in sight.

He watched her as a fox watches a hare from the mouth of his den; but at the same time he paid some attention to the meal which had been set before him.

Nell was fully aware of the espionage of the cool black eyes; but she did not choose to let the watcher know that she suspected him.

Despard was in no hurry to finish his supper.

The Dodger and Brandon beat him though, but kept their seats, for in passing out they would have to brush the city sharp and invite recognition.

"Let him finish," whispered Dodger Dick. "He has not seen us. Nell is the only person he looks at, and that is for a purpose. He is finishing now. No! another cup of coffee, from Nell's hands of course!"

Despard seemed to linger in the place, but, when he had emptied his second cup, no excuse for a longer stay could be found, and he reluctantly left his chair.

The Dodger and his friend saw him leave the room.

"Now!" cried the wharf spy. "Let us see what becomes of this fellow."

Despard led the two a hasty chase to the sidewalk where he was joined by a woman who occupied a carriage a few feet away.

"Aha! look at that!" exclaimed the Dodger. "My old friend is not alone to-night. It is a chance which I cannot afford to miss. Look here, Mr. Brandon. Meet me under the tree, you know which one, in Battery Park in two hours. It has quit raining, and you won't get wet."

The carriage which Dan Despard had entered was moving off, and, before Brandon could answer, the Dodger bounded away and almost immediately vanished.

"I have two hours on my hands," muttered the young man. "What shall I do? I believe I will go back and drink another cup of coffee."

The following moment he re-entered the dining room, now not very much rushed, and proceeded to the little table at one end.

Newspaper Nell saw him re-enter and when he sat down she was at his side.

"Where is Dick?" asked the girl in low tones.

"He struck a trail," replied Brandon.

"The trail of the man who got supper here! What will you have, sir?"

"A cup of coffee."

Angus Brandon did not care so much for the coffee as he did for a chance to enter into conversation with Newspaper Nell.

The name and something about the girl, he could not tell what, attracted him. He wondered how the Dodger first picked up acquaintance with her, and whether they had been friends very long.

Then his thoughts would advert to Dan Despard, the man whom he had not seen since the fatal night when his fortune and good name

were wrecked. He had cause to hate that man, and Elroy Surface who had assisted in his ruin.

He wanted to tell Nell how he had been driven from pillar to post by the black-mailers, but perhaps the girl would not sympathize with him. She might be prouder than her station indicated, and Brandon resolved to keep silent for the time.

When Nell came back with his order she had nothing to do for the moment.

"Dick and you are friends?" began Brandon, looking up in her face.

"Indeed we are!" smiled Nell. "I have known Dodger some time, and he is one of my patrons."

"Where is your stand or 'beat'?"

"Near the corner of Wall and Broadway."

"I have noticed you there," observed Brandon, and then he thought of Dodger Dick and his quarry.

"The man whom I called Despard has been watching you?"

"Yes. Sometimes he is not alone."

"What sort of companion has he?"

"A young man about your age."

"And my size, too?" asked Brandon eagerly.

"I think so."

"It must be Elroy Surface, another person who can never claim my friendship."

"I do not like to be watched. It is annoying," said Nell. "All I ask is to make a living undisturbed. Those men have never offered any indignity, but their spy on me is very obtrusive. I wish I were rid of it. Dick has promised to sift the matter to the bottom."

"Did you know until to-night that he had been watching Dan Despard—for ten days, he said?"

"I knew he was working up a case, as he calls it, but I had no idea that he suspected the man who has been annoying me."

"What kind of a case was it?"

The question was most natural, and Newspaper Nell met it with a smile.

"He never told me much about it," she replied. "I think, though, that the house of a rich man up-town was burglarized, and a lot of important papers and some money taken. I cannot tell you how Dodger Dick got drawn into the affair, but he is into it, and is doing all he can to find the papers and the thief."

"I thought he lived on the wharves."

"So he does when he is not with Mother Sturgeon, as he calls the woman who raised him. You will have to excuse me now. It is my time to finish up my duties here. We will meet again, perhaps. Good-night, sir!" And Angus Brandon was left alone, before he could detain Nell another moment.

"She is pretty and clever," he exclaimed to himself. "She is fitted to occupy a higher station than the one she fills. But if Dan Despard and his young partner, Elroy Surface, have got their eyes on her she is gone."

A minute later the young man completed his second supper, and left the house.

Instinctively he turned his face toward the Battery, where he was to meet the Dodger at the end of two hours.

He had nowhere else to go, for he did not wish to run any chances of meeting either of the men who had brought about his downfall.

As he turned the nearest corner two wagons came together with a crash. One was completely overturned and badly wrecked, and the driver was thrown under the wheels.

It was a common city occurrence, and not the first of the kind Brandon had witnessed.

The young man was the first person on the scene, but by the time he had dragged the unfortunate driver from the ruins of his vehicle, a considerable crowd had collected.

Brandon lent his assistance until it was no longer needed; then he resumed his walk. As he stepped upon the pavement, he caught sight of a face that attracted him, and when its owner moved away, he recognized Newspaper Nell.

In an instant Brandon resolved to follow the girl at a safe distance for the purpose of protecting her should she need protection, and also with a view of obtaining a little information about her home.

The girl kept on at a good pace, as if eager to reach her destination in a short time, and Brandon saw her look back several times, as though she feared she was being followed.

"Nell's suspicions are well grounded!" suddenly exclaimed Brandon. "I see now that she has some one on her track."

Not far behind the girl walked a man who timed his movements to her, and who was watching her closely.

He was about Brandon's size, his clothes were

good and fitted him nicely, and he carried a small cane like a gentleman on promenade.

A soft hat with ample brim was pulled over his forehead and concealed a part of his face.

"I want a look at him," muttered Brandon, quickening his gait.

He took good care not to excite the suspicions of the person so stealthily following the girl, and in a moment he had seen a face which drew a cry to his lips.

"It is the other rascal!" burst from the young man. "It is Dan Despard's partner in villainy, Elroy Surface!"

Brandon could hardly restrain himself at sight of the man he had discovered.

He seemed to gasp for breath. "I ought to show him that I am here by pitching him into the street!" he cried. "The two devils are working together yet, as when they plotted against me. Ten chances to one that the woman whom Despard joined in the cab was the one who has black-mailed me. Give me an opportunity, 'Roy Surface. Ah! what are you going to do—stop, Nell?"

At this moment the girl's tracker was within reach of her. He had covered the distance between them by two quick bounds, and Brandon guessed his intention.

The next instant the young man darted forward, and landed behind 'Roy Surface as he raised his hand to detain the girl.

"None of that, Mr. Surface!" burst from Brandon's throat as he caught the young rascal's shoulder, and whirled him about without ceremony. "Can't a lady walk the streets of New York by gaslight without being contaminated by your vile touch?"

A light cry came from Newspaper Nell as she turned and took in the scene at a glance.

"Who are you?" demanded Surface, coloring, as his eyes flashed.

"You ought to know me!" was the prompt response. "I have a debt to pay, 'Roy Surface. I want to settle with you for a ruined character—"

"Angus Brandon, the safe-robber!" interrupted Surface. "You had better go and settle with your uncle!"

These words drew a mad exclamation from Brandon as he clinched his hands.

He sprang straight at 'Roy Surface and forced the young man to throw up his hand in self-defense.

But Brandon's assault was simply resistless. A sight of his secret enemy, coupled with the insult just offered, goaded him to madness, and he landed a blow between the eyes which sent Surface headlong toward the gutter.

"That for the past!" cried Brandon as he waited for Surface to rise.

Nell stood spellbound on the scene.

A little crowd was already on hand, and Brandon felt a grip at his arm.

"That is the man, sir! I was brutally struck without provocation!" cried Surface. "I'll appear against him, and give him all he wants."

"Come with me," said the policeman, and Brandon was marched off.

CHAPTER III.

THE DODGER ON THE TRAIL.

"UNLESS something unexpected operates in my favor, I will not get to meet the Dodger in Battery Park," thought Brandon while he walked from the scene of the encounter with Elroy Surface.

"I know something about the cops of New York, and this one is not likely to take my protestations against the charge of a well-dressed fellow like the rascal I first punished. I've got to grin and bear it. As for 'Roy Surface appearing against me—I am not afraid of that. He doesn't play an open game with an enemy."

Not long after the fight and the arrest, Brandon was behind the bars of a station-house cell with the charge of assault opposite his name on the blotter. The young man's anger had not cooled, and if 'Roy Surface had called to urge prosecution, he would have had to keep clear of his victim.

Meantime, Dodger Dick was far away, totally ignorant of the hostile meeting on the sidewalk.

We have seen the boy spy spring after the cab which carried Dan Despard from the vicinity of the boarding-house, and, with Brandon shut up for the night in a place where he had never been before, we are at liberty to follow him.

The Dodger was not near enough when the cab started off to hear the greeting Despard received from the woman who occupied a part of it.

"Is she there?" asked this woman who was still young and beautiful.

"Yes," answered Despard. "We know where to find her when she is wanted."

"Are they alike?"

"Strikingly so."

"That is superb!" cried the woman. "I would like to have seen her myself, but I am willing to take your word for it. What kind of place is it?"

"The supper isn't as fine as we get at Demonico's, but it satisfies a hungry man," responded Despard with a laugh. "Nell is active, attentive and always good-humored."

The woman seemed to shrug her shoulders over this compliment.

"You were not watched?" she went on.

"Watched by whom?"

"By the boy who has become his ferret."

"That old fear again, Thalia!" exclaimed Despard. "I have told you before now that I don't believe he has anything to do with the wharf rat. If I thought he had employed him, I'd turn aside just long enough to choke him off."

"Roy thinks so."

"Roy runs at a shadow sometimes!"

Thalia settled back into her corner and looked at her companion, whose face she saw for a moment when the cab rattled past a lamp.

If she had looked out of the little window in the back of the vehicle, she would have caught a glimpse of something human in shape between the hind wheels.

But, Despard had hooted at the suggestion that he may have been watched, and caution on Thalia's part was not needed.

The noise made by the cab and by the passing trains of the Elevated roads, drowned for Dodger the conversation just given.

If he had heard it, his eyes would have got a brighter gleam, and Despard's words might have called a laugh into existence.

The cab kept on up-town until it turned into Tenth street.

The Dodger kept his uncomfortable position with much pluck.

When the horses drew suddenly to the sidewalk, he pushed his lithe body still further under the cab, and waited for the next move.

A moment afterward the door of the vehicle opened and Despard got out. Then he assisted the woman to the sidewalk, and the two turned to the house at hand.

Dodger Dick moved his head just enough to enable him to note the building, and to see Despard and Thalia mount the steps.

Then the driver touched the horses with the whip and the Dodger was whisked away, and out of sight.

At the first crossing the wharf spy disengaged himself from the uncomfortable perch, and dropped to the ground.

"Thanks, most noble duke!" laughed Dick, waving his hand at the driver who drove on, unconscious of the extra passenger he had just lost.

"When I come into possession of my fortune I'll settle the score; and I owe a lot of cabbies for little accommodations like this. I did find Dan Despard's retreat at last. Now, I'll go back and see if anything of importance can be discovered. Plenty of time yet to meet my new friend, Brandon, in the Park. Jehu! I think Newspaper Nell made an impression on him! He must be a poor snipe who can't see that Nell is the boss girl of Gotham."

The Dodger walked back toward the house to which he had tracked the occupants of the cab.

It was a well-to-do three story building, with a genteel outward appearance, and looked not unlike thousands of respectable boarding-houses of the city.

It stood behind a couple of maple trees that fringed the sidewalk, and threw a heavy shade as high as the caps of the third-story windows.

Dodger Dick sauntered slowly up to the house and read the name of "Findlay" on the door-plate.

"By Jupiter! that recalls an aunt of mine Mother Sturgeon sometimes talks about!" muttered the Dodger. "Her name was Findlay after she married a man who came to New York, and surprised everybody by getting rich. But, that was long ago, before I concluded to board on this planet. Findlay, eh? That's the way her husband spelled the name; but of course this isn't my worthy relative."

While Dick communed thus the door of the house opened and two young men came out.

The boy darted behind one of the trees and stood like a statue there.

"Hang it all, Chawley, I say, that's a chawming young cweature on the floor under us!" drawled one of the couple.

"Entirely too exclusive for us, old boy," was the answer.

"Dudes!" exclaimed Dick in tones of lofty contempt. "There be better looking members of their family in the zoo at Central Park. I saw one of those dear creatures fall overboard at the ferry the other day, and he almost froze me with a look when I pulled him out with a barge hook. That is a boarding-house, and the dudes have left for a night lark. But Despard does not come out. No, not he!"

If the boy could have entered the house at that moment and been allowed the freedom of the place, he would have seen Dan Despard in a room with Thalia and a young girl who, despite the rich clothes she wore, resembled Newspaper Nell.

"It won't be long, Ione," said Thalia, turning to the girl whose face had just been clouded by a pout.

"Make it soon!" was the quick answer. "I want to be somebody. I want to be able to show myself in the parks in a carriage. This is torture here. Why don't you bring the game to an issue?"

She leaned to Despard as she finished, and looked him in the eye.

"It takes a little time," he replied.

"You have the papers—all of them—for you have said so. You said some days ago that I was the very counterpart of the girl you call Newspaper Nell. I'd like to see her. If she is like me, she is pretty, ha, ha! But, I'll wager a world that her blood is not as blue as mine. What do you say?" And she turned upon Thalia, laughing till her deep black eyes sparkled like gems.

"I'm proud of your blood, Ione," responded Thalia, who was the girl's senior by some years.

"You ought to be," smiled Dan Despard.

There was a light laugh all around.

"Where did you leave 'Roy'?" suddenly asked Thalia, and at mention of the name the girl, Ione, gave a slight start.

"Down-town."

"He was here to-day," put in Ione.

"In this house?" exclaimed Thalia.

"Yes. Why not?"

"When was it?"

"This afternoon."

"He did not stay?"

"Not long. He believes that the game is being watched."

"By whom?" asked Despard.

"By a boy who is said to be in the pay of the police."

Despard sent a quick look toward the woman.

"She means the young wharf rat whose shadow has frightened you," he smiled.

"Don't you believe it?" exclaimed the girl.

"Not a word of it!"

"Roy says he has good grounds for thinking so."

"To perdition with his grounds! 'Roy is sometimes a coward who—"

Ione sprung from her chair and was at Despard's side in an instant.

"You don't want to apply that epithet to 'Roy in my presence!" she cried, looking down into Despard's face, and her hand at the same time closed on his arm. "A coward, is he? You don't know what we will have to call you before the play is out."

She dropped his arm, gave him a lofty look, and went to the window.

Opening the slats just a little she looked down into the street, her bosom still heaving with excitement, and her eyes full of fire.

All at once she wheeled upon Despard, who had studied her in silence.

"You are watched now, at this very moment!" she said in low tones.

Dan Despard left his chair like a bolt.

"Where? By whom, Ione?"

"The spy is on the sidewalk, against the tree. I have just seen him. It is the boy 'Roy' talked about. Look for yourself."

CHAPTER IV.

DESPARD'S TARTAR.

DODGER DICK was about to desert his station when Ione, glancing downward through the slats of the inside shutters, saw him at the tree.

The boy had at last located Despard, whom he had been shadowing for some days, and he was anxious to get back and rejoin Angus Brandon in the Park.

If he had left a moment sooner Ione would not have discovered him, nor would Despard have started toward the door with a muffled oath.

"What are you going to do?" exclaimed the girl, seeing the flashes of rage that lit up the city tiger's eyes.

"I'll show that young ferret that I can't be tracked with impunity!" was the quick retort.

"He may not be a spy?"

"Then, why is he down there? No, Ione, you can't save the young imp. We want no such obstacles in our path."

The door opened and shut, and Despard was gone.

He went down the stair with a tread not likely to alarm any one.

"Now I'll show him!" he said through his teeth when he reached the front door. "By Jove! 'Roy may be right, after all."

The succeeding moment Despard opened the door and stepped out.

He had already marked the Dodger's position, and his first glance was toward the tree.

"Gone, by Jupiter!" ejaculated Despard. "I wonder if the street fox heard me?" And the man stood on the lower step perplexed and decidedly out of humor.

If he had looked up at that moment he might have discovered Ione at the window, for the girl could not curb her curiosity, and was eager to witness the expected collision.

Despard cast mad looks up and down the street.

Not far away he caught sight of a moving figure, not large enough to be a man's.

"That is the young spy," he exclaimed, and then he started off, seeing no one but the person whom his eyes had singled out.

Despard thought he would know the wharf spy detective, and he had no doubts of the identity of the boy upon whom he was stealing with eager and noiseless strides.

Suddenly, in the shadow of a tree, the hand of Dan Despard fell like an eagle's claw upon his victim's shoulder.

"Caught at last!" he hissed, leaning forward.

"You don't want to open your talk-trap, my young shadow. If you make a noise, I'll make it decidedly uncomfortable for you. I guess you know me!" and he gave the startled youth a look fierce enough to frighten the bravest.

It never entered Despard's head that he had caught the wrong person.

He did not think that the Dodger had vanished, and that fate had substituted another. The boy clutched by Despard had a cry on his lips when he saw the glittering eyes, and heard the threat emphasized by their ferocious glare.

"You're a pretty night cat, ain't you?" continued the New York sharp, holding the boy firmly. "Don't you know that you're not at home when you leave the wharves? In Merle Mallot's pay, eh? Well, you're liable to quit his employ, quite liable to, I should say."

"I'm not the boy you're looking for!" stammered the lad at a venture. "Indeed—'pon my honor—I'm Jerry Jack, an' I live on the next street."

"A lie for the occasion!" laughed Despard. "You needn't think I'm going to let you out of the trap for it."

"Mother 'll make it hot for you!" cried the boy, getting courage. "If I'm not Jerry Jack there's no New York. Who do you think I am, captain?"

Despard began to doubt the identity of his catch. There was something in the boy's voice and face, as he could see the latter in the shadows, that gave his declarations the impress of truth.

But he was not willing to give up.

"Maybe you think I'm the boy who skipped past me just before you nailed me?" continued the sharp's prisoner. "I've not been doing anything that I should be clutched in this manner. Do you think Jerry Jack 'd steal?"

Just then a woman, bare-headed and a perfect Amazon in figure, came around the corner and looked up the street, and toward Despard and the boy.

"Here I am, mother!" vociferated the youth. "This gentleman has caught me for somebody else, and he doesn't want to let me go."

In an instant the woman bounded forward, and Dan Despard felt a hand at his wrist, and saw two mad eyes before him.

"Drop this boy!—drop him right away!" cried the woman. "I'll show you what it means to stop Jerry Jack on the street when he is running errands for his mother. I'll toss you into the gutter if you hold him a second! Wanted to kidnap him, did you? Where's the big cop who stands at the corner?"

Despard was now convinced that he had made a mistake, and as he did not want a personal encounter with the bare-headed Amazon, he gave up the prisoner, and growled out an

apology which was received with very bad grace.

"Which way did the boy go that passed you?" Despard asked Jerry Jack.

"I guess not, captain!" replied the boy retreating behind his mother. "Since you've acted so fresh, you can find the kid for yourself."

Despard grew furious, and if the boy had been within reach at that moment, he might have felt the sharp's boot. But Mrs. Jack stood a barrier between, and Despard had to waste his ire.

"Come home, Jerry," said the woman. "I came just in time to rescue you from the hands of a rascal, and if he doesn't quit these parts, we'll see what the cops can do with him."

And with a hot and haughty look at Despard, the giantess walked her boy off in triumph.

"Curse the blunder!" muttered the New York schemer when he found himself empty-handed on the street. "That boy I caught was not the one Ione saw from the window. That spy was Dodger Dick, and it was he who passed my catch just before I came up. This being the case, he isn't far off. I'd give a good deal to pounce upon him as I did upon Mrs. Jack's hopeful."

Despard walked to the corner, on the lookout for boys. His failure to catch the Dodger nettled him, and no wonder, for if Dick had tracked Thalia to her headquarters, he had scored an important point in the game.

Mrs. Jack and Jerry had promptly vanished, and the woman was already narrating to some horrified neighbors her thrilling rescue of her boy from the clutches of a kidnapper.

The man did not like to give the Dodger up.

Five minutes had not passed since Ione's discovery from the window, and in that time young Jack had been captured and released.

"Must I go back with no fish in the net?" exclaimed Despard, forced to swallow his disappointment. "Ione will laugh at me and both of the women will say that the spy was Merle Mallot's young ferret. Confound it! there's nothing else for me to do. I wish Ione had spied the boy a little sooner."

Despard took one last look up and down the street. His eyes seemed to see every object within a certain distance, but, keen as they were, they could not single out the young spy of the wharf.

At length Despard turned reluctantly back.

"Hello! cap'n, didn't you drop somethin'?" rung out in clear tones the voice of a boy, and when Despard wheeled he saw a veritable street gamin stooping almost at his very feet.

"I guess not, Johnny," he replied. "What is it?" and he leaned toward the little fellow who was holding up something like a well-worn buckskin purse.

"I found it right hyer, an' you've just left the spot," resumed the boy. "If it's yours, cap'n, hyer it is. It doesn't feel like a Government treasury, but thar's something in it all the same."

Despard looked searchingly at the boy for a moment, for he had grown very suspicious within the last few minutes, and then he held his hand out for the purse which was delivered up.

"Jerry Jack didn't drop it for he don't have such things," grinned the boy.

"Neither do I—not such affairs like that," answered Despard handing the purse back.

"Mebbe I'll get to keep the find. Whew! ice cream at Fuseli's an' a cigarette on the cellar door! If Dick Sly had seen it, I wouldn't be on the edge of a fortune."

Dan Despard started.

"Who is Dick Sly?" he asked with eagerness that more than half betrayed him.

"Don't you know? Why, he's Mother Sturgeon's boy! I am Burt Bluster an' Dick an' I ar' old acquaintances, but not Siamese twins in friendship, bet yer head, cap'n."

"You don't like the Dodger?"

"Not with a love that lingers!" laughed the youngster. "He's a wharf rat, cap'n, an' the Blusters ar' above that, miles above it!"

"Where does Mother Sturgeon live?"

"She's moved lately an' I don't know where she is just now."

"Could you find her?"

"I might."

"Would you do it if I could make it worth your while?"

"I don't know why I should not," was the answer.

Despard ran his hand into one of his pockets. "I'd like to know where Mother Sturgeon resides," he continued, withdrawing his hand and dexterously showing the boy the faces of two

silver dollars. "Dick comes home occasionally, I presume?"

"Oh, yes. He doesn't frequent the wharves like he used to. I know 'im a sight, you see, an' then, cap'n, I'm willin' to help you because I don't like him any too well."

The next moment the dollars changed hands, and Burt Bluster's browned fingers closed on them like the lid of a trap.

"Where shall I report, cap'n?" he inquired, looking up into Despard's face.

The city sharp thought for a moment.

"At Number —, Bleeker street, up-stairs, second floor, first door to the right."

"I'll hit the bull's-eye the first time!" exclaimed the boy.

"If you come when I am not in, drop Mother Sturgeon's address into the letter-box on the door. You can write?"

"Not like a perfesser, cap'n, but I can make letters."

Two minutes later Despard walked back, congratulating himself on his good fortune, while the boy stepped into a doorway and put on a coat which he had left there.

"All's fair in war, Dan Despard!" he laughed. "I guess I scored a point to-night!"

The boy was Dodger Dick!

CHAPTER V.

THE NEXT MOVE.

By the time the young shadow reached Battery place it was almost the hour appointed for the rendezvous with Angus Brandon.

The Dodger knew nothing about the young man's encounter with Roy Surface, and going straight to the place of meeting previously agreed upon, he began to wait for Brandon's coming.

Some time before this the rain had ceased to fall, and the Park was resuming its wonted appearance. The old benchers who frequented it during a great part of the day, and long after nightfall, had come back to their places, and Dick for a time amused himself watching them.

At length the hour went by, but Brandon did not come.

"Mebbe he thinks I ain't the kind o' company he ought to keep," muttered the Dodger. "Well, I don't belong to the aristocracy of New York, but I guess I'm high-toned enough to be the acquaintance of a— No! I won't say that! Angus Brandon has been shamefully wronged by Dan Despard and his pals; an' while my name is Dick Sly, I'll stand by him till he gets even. If he doesn't come within the next ten minutes I'll go up-town an' see how things are running at the Mallot mansion."

The brief period mentioned by Dodger Dick passed without a sight of the face of young Brandon, and after taking a final turn through the Park, the boy went back.

If he had known about Brandon's bad luck, a certain station-house would have received a visit from a boy well known to the officer in charge.

The Dodger had a few cents in his purse—the same one he had pretended to force upon Dan Despard, and five of these took him up-town on the Elevated road.

He rode to within a square of an elegant house above Twentieth street, and in response to his ring, he was ushered into a hall, where he hung his somewhat dilapidated hat next door to an oval mirror, and alongside a very glossy tile.

"You will find Mr. Mallot in there," continued the woman who had admitted him, and the Dodger was shown into a room elegantly furnished and expressive of wealth and refinement.

At that moment the room had but one tenant, a middle-aged, robust, but stern-looking man. He reclined in a luxurious easy-chair, with his slippered feet on a cushion before him.

"Aha! I've just been thinking about you!" exclaimed the man. "Think about an imp and he turns up, or something that way, you know."

Dick had dropped into a chair which seemed to fit him exactly, and he laughed a little at the speaker's words.

The man was Merle Mallot, and he was a merchant whose retirement from business the papers had announced within the last few weeks.

It was said that he had retired on account of an obscure disease that was slowly sapping his strength. This was one opinion. There was another that Merle Mallot had been black-mailed to a fearful extent, and other opinions still, which we need not ventilate here.

Dodger Dick had made the merchant's acquaintance by an accident which succeeded a mysterious burglary that had thrown a cloud over Mallot's life.

It was true, as Roy Surface pretended to have

discovered, that the Dodger was in Mallot's employ.

Mallot had ideas of his own, and one of these was that the police were not to be trusted.

He wanted the burglar of his private room hunted down and his papers recovered, but he did not want to have it done by the force.

Hence his employment of Dick Sly.

He believed that the boy was shrewd and faithful, in which belief he was correct; but he took good care not to tell Dick too much.

"Well, have you any report to make?" asked Mallot, after his observation.

"Not much," replied the Dodger. "I would like to ask you one thing, Mr. Mallot."

"Well, go ahead."

"You have told me that you suspect a man whom you call Angus."

"That is all right. I see you have a good memory."

"May I ask if his other name is not Brandon—Angus Brandon in full?"

Merle Mallot appeared to gasp, and his hands closed spasmodically on the arms of his chair.

"Where did you get the other part of the name?" he asked.

The Dodger smiled.

"You forget that I am a city ferret," he observed. "I am liable to make several discoveries as I proceed in this affair. Yes, Angus Brandon is the name."

"And a name I have cause to hate!" said Mallot, through his teeth.

"He was in your employ once."

"And he robbed me without scruples!" flashed Merle Mallot. "I tell you, Dodger Dick, that you will find the burglar when you find this young scapegrace. Listen to me. I took him into my store a short time ago because he was my sister's child, and I wanted to do something for him. What did he do? He hastened to get into bad company; he went from bad to worse under my very eyes, and at last, to keep himself going, he robbed me."

"What did you do?" asked the Dodger, quickly.

"What would any man in my situation have done?" exclaimed Mallot. "I turned him adrift. I want no thieves about me. I could have sent him to Sing Sing, where he belonged, but I was his uncle, and the disgrace which the sentence would have heaped upon me, stayed my hand. He knew I had important papers in my library yonder. He was aware that some money was near them. Nobody else knew it; that is, no regular thief. Yes, sir, I say plainly, since you have made the discovery you speak of, that Angus Brandon is the man for whom you must look. I want the papers. They are worth more than money. He can never realize on them; they are not what he expected to take."

Merle Mallot spoke with bitterness and anger.

The veins in his forehead swelled and the effort flushed his face.

"Did you ever think that Angus Brandon may have been lured to his ruin by some of the city chaps, and that the money taken from the safe at the store may not have benefited him?"

"Not for a moment!" cried the merchant. "He is the thief! Why, when I confronted him with certain evidence which my detectives had obtained, he did not deny it. He went away muttering something about getting even one of these days. If I had clapped him into prison then I would not be needing your services now. I did not want to have to tell you this. I had hoped I had given you a clew of another kind. Now I shall not stop until my papers are back in my hands and the rascal, blood of my blood, is behind the bars! You want to make sure of the papers, Mr. Dick. If he can, he will destroy them before they shall become evidence against him. Why, to tell the truth, I could almost see him hanged!"

The Dodger made no reply, but studied Merle Mallot while he leaned back in his chair almost exhausted by his display of passion.

"I've heard both stories," he mentally exclaimed. "This man isn't willing to think that Dan Despard or anybody but Angus Brandon committed the crime. I don't believe the young man guilty, and, unless Despard and the league about him trips me very soon, I'll open Merle Mallot's eyes."

"Is that all you want to know?" suddenly asked the merchant with a peculiar smile.

"About all," answered Dick. "Could anybody realize on the documents which you have lost?"

Merle Mallot started visibly.

"The right parties might," he said. "But," he added, quickly, "I tell you that they'll never

do Angus Brandon a particle of good. I'll fight them to the bitter end, and I've got money enough to buy the best jury in New York. I'd like to see that young safe-breaker come to me for compromise. I don't pay him a dollar!"

Dodger Dick did not like to have Merle Mallot go on in this manner. When he was excited, he spoke in loud tones, and the boy did not know who might be in the house.

He had succeeded in his mission to the Mallot mansion, and was ready to take his departure.

"Hunt the young rascal down," exclaimed the merchant. "You know who he is, and you ought to be able to find him. I presume he would like to make another raid on my premises, but I am prepared for him now, well prepared!" and Mallot laughed in a manner which left no doubts as to the full meaning of his words.

The Dodger promised to report as soon as he had anything important to communicate, and he told Merle Mallot that he hoped to have news before long.

Then he walked out of the room, leaving the city nabob alone.

While he was taking his hat from the rack in the hall he heard a soft, almost cat-like, tread behind him, and wheeling, he found himself face to face with a young girl of sixteen.

"You are the boy we have put on the burglar's trail, ain't you?" asked the girl.

"I am Dodger Dick."

"Yes. Some of us suspect Cousin Angus who used to be in the store, but I do not. The man who came that night and drugged papa in the library was taller than Angus. I saw him for a moment, for he raised his mask on the stairs; but I dare not say so in this house. I want you to find the right person, Dodger Dick."

"I will find him!" cried the boy, leaning toward the sparkling black eyes. "And he won't be Angus Brandon, either."

CHAPTER VI.

DESPARD PICKS UP A LINK.

"HAVE you been through a wind-mill?"

"No; I was struck by a cyclone."

"You've had a fight, 'Roy."

The reply to this last observation was a sickly smile which did not enhance the speaker's looks.

Roy Surface and Despard had met again, and the former's face still showed marks of young Brandon's punishment.

As the reader can imagine, Surface was not in good-humor, but while he told Despard about Brandon's arrest by the policeman, his eyes got a vengeful sparkle and he laughed in triumph.

"You don't intend to appear against him, do you?" asked Despard.

"Not I! I have no desire to show up in a police court just now. He will get to the Island anyhow, for I am convinced that he has not a dollar to his name, and the cop who effected the arrest knows me."

"That will settle Brandon," said Despard with a smile. "I had not seen the young fellow for some time. Thalia, you know, quit bleeding him because he had no more blood to yield. He won't hurt anybody. But what became of the girl—Newspaper Nell?"

"She vanished like a sprite after I got my lick," answered Roy.

"Didn't you find her again?"

"She was not to escape me so easily!" exclaimed the young man. "I started after her when Brandon had been marched off by the cop, and overtook her nearly two squares away. You can bet your head, Dan Despard, that I did not let her get away again."

"Whither did she go?"

"To the lodgings she occupies in a quiet side street. I marked the house, took down the number and all, so we're perfectly safe on that score. The girl is a beauty, sure enough, Dan, and I never noticed the striking resemblance between her and Ione so much before."

"It is remarkable, isn't it?" laughed Despard. "Now, 'Roy, I want to put you on your guard. You were right about that wharf rat being after us."

"Dodger Dick? I thought so!" cried the young man.

"I caught him at work to-night."

"You? Of course you made short work of him."

"Curse it all! he slipped through my fingers," growled Despard. "I've got a good show of nabbing him soon, however. I was lucky enough to find a boy who knew him, and who holds a grudge against him, too. He is to get me the present address of Mother Sturgeon, the young ferret's second mother. After that, we can easily trap him, for he often visits the old lady."

The boy is to report at the house on Bleecker street; he is to drop the address into the letter-box if he does not find either of us in when he calls. We want to be around the place a good deal within the next two days, for Burt Bluster, my spy, looks like a shrewd lark, and is likely to discover something within that time. Would you mind giving me Nell's address, 'Roy'?"

"Certainly not," was the prompt reply, and the young sport took from a memorandum-book a bit of paper, which he handed to Despard.

The New York sharp uttered an exclamation of surprise when he glanced at the directions.

"She is in a quiet neighborhood, sure enough," he cried.

"I thought so," smiled 'Roy.

"What is the house like?"

"It is a plain, two-story brick, with shutters. The girl lodges there merely, no more, I am satisfied. She works for her meals at the old frame eating-house, as we have already discovered."

Despard took a copy of the address and handed the original back to his companion.

A few minutes later the couple separated on the street, and 'Roy received instructions to be at the Bleecker street house a good deal during the coming day for the purpose of receiving Burt Bluster's report.

If the two rascals had suspected that Burt was the Dodger who had played a neat trick on Despard, they would not have taken so much stock in his expected work.

Despard looked at his watch as he turned from his younger pard.

The hour was not late, for he had been lucky enough to find 'Roy soon after the collision on the sidewalk.

"I'll take a look at the premises for a visit tomorrow before Nell goes to her post," he said to himself, turning into a street at his right. "The neighborhood is almost too quiet to operate successfully in, but we must not stop on that account. Ione is impatient, and Thalia is not unlike her, though she does not say so much. I confess that I'm eager to see the game at an end, and I know that 'Roy wants to change his clothes."

Not long afterward, the figure of Dan Despard glided into one of the quietest streets of middle New York, and his eyes singled out an unpretending brick house with shutters tightly closed, and not a sign of light visible.

It was the building briefly described in a sentence by 'Roy, as the one into which he had tracked Newspaper Nell.

Despard inspected it from roof to foundation with the caution of a spy who views a fort intended to be assaulted. He had a keen eye, and on this occasion nothing was permitted to escape him.

He tried to speculate the particular room occupied by the girl, but of course he had to give over the attempt.

Suddenly the front door of the house was opened just a little, as if some one inside was viewing the land without.

The next moment a female came forth.

Despard started at sight of her.

"It is the girl herself!" exclaimed the Gotham sport, as he drew back so as not to be seen by Nell. "I wonder what draws her into the street at this hour?"

At that moment the figure of the Dodger's friend flitted by, and then Despard followed.

It was not the first time the cool, calculating villain had followed people through the tortuous streets of New York after dark.

He was as good as any human ferret for keeping them in sight, and he had a knack of doing it without being seen himself.

There was a gleam of victory in Despard's eyes.

The girl had changed her dress since supper, and the change was calculated to deceive many who were accustomed to seeing her selling papers at her old stand.

Nell did not seem to think that she was followed.

She walked rapidly, but not like a person chased, and Despard had no little difficulty in keeping her in sight among the night pedestrians.

She led him toward the river, a strange place for a young girl to visit alone after sundown.

"She isn't going to throw herself into the water!" cried Despard. "By Jove! I don't know whether I would attempt to rescue her or not. If she wants to be

"One more unfortunate,
Rashly importunate,"

why, let her go ahead! It would make the field

clearer for us, and get us rid of a peck of trouble."

But Newspaper Nell had no intentions of adding a new name to the river's victims, for, instead of pushing to the edge of the wharf, she turned suddenly aside, and disappeared in a house when Despard looked for no move of the kind.

"What can her errand be?" muttered the city tiger, while he looked at the building and wondered who might inhabit it. "She did not come down here for nothing; that is certain. She wants to see some one. This is the spot said to be Dodger Dick's ground, for this is Pier Number —. It can't be possible that Newspaper Nell knows the wharf rat who has hired to Merle Mallot in the capacity of ferret? Her beat is somewhat up town; his is down here by the river."

Despard was puzzled. There were not many people to be seen about the place, and the few were those who were seldom visible during the day.

The New York sport selected a convenient post and began to watch the house, for he did not deem it advisable to follow Nell beyond the threshold.

Five, ten, twenty minutes passed away. They were hours to Dan Despard.

At length a boy came gliding past his post.

"Hi, there!" called the tiger, leaning forward.

The wharf rat started like a person caught in an evil act.

"I want to see you, Johnny. I'm no cop," continued Despard.

The little fellow came up emboldened by the assurance and waited for the man to proceed.

"What kind of a house is that?" resumed Despard, designating the building just entered by Nell.

"That's Baldy's place."

"Ah! who lives there?"

"A good many people. Baldy doesn't charge much for his rooms, and you can get a ten-cent bed in the upper stories. Why, bless you, cap'n, some o' us wharfers get a little high-toned sometimes, an' we sleep at Baldy's instead o' among the bales an' boxes along the river."

"Does Dodger Dick ever get above his station?"

The boy laughed and threw back his head haughtily.

"Now you're comin' at it!" he cried. "The Dodger has felt his oats ever since he helped to find the lost heir o' the uptown nabob. He don't sleep on the wharf much any more, for he's got a bed at Baldy's."

A look of triumph lit up Despard's eyes.

"The puzzle isn't hard now," he murmured. "Newspaper Nell has come down here to see the water rat of Gotham."

"What do you want ter know about the Dodger?" asked the boy.

"Nothing now," was the reply. "He isn't in Baldy's just now I presume?"

"He might be."

"Do you ever go inside?"

"No siree! I b'long to the wharfers who boycott Baldy's. We don't allow anybody to think us aristocrats. The Dodger an' his ilk kin spend their money for pillows; but we don't patronize the institution!"

Despard had no further use for the gamin whose appearance was by no means aristocratic, and a quarter sent him off rejoicing.

"My tramp has not been for nothing," exclaimed the city sport with a look at the house designated as Baldy's. "If Dodger Dick is Nell's friend, and knows anything, he is doubly dangerous!"

CHAPTER VII.

A THIN DISGUISE.

THE next day 'Roy Surface was on guard at the Bleecker street house waiting for the boy known to Despard as Burt Bluster. As a matter of course, the spy did not put in an appearance, for Dodger Dick was a little afraid to trust his make-up to the keen eyes of either of the city sharps in daylight.

Despard had made up his mind that Newspaper Nell had called on the Dodger at Baldy's the night before, and he resolved to entrap the young wharf ferret as soon as possible.

His first move after breakfast was to the quiet neighborhood where Nell lodged.

He knew that the girl would not be found at her street stand until in the afternoon, and he was reasonably certain of finding her at the house.

The Gotham tiger dressed himself for the occasion, and when he knocked at the door of the plain brick domicile, he looked like a well-to-do

gentleman with a good deal of leisure on his hands.

He was met at the door by an elderly woman, who looked over her spectacles in surprise at him.

As Despard did not know the girl's name, or pretended not to, he asked for "Miss Nelly."

The woman said she was up-stairs, and if Despard would step inside, she would come down and receive him.

It was evident that Nell had not told her landlady about the collision between Brandon and 'Roy, else Despard would not have met with such a cordial reception.

In a little while there were light footsteps on the stair, and Newspaper Nell stood before the villain.

An instant later the girl seemed to recognize her visitor, or, at least, to guess at his mission.

"I believe you are the young lady who sells papers at the corner of Wall and Broadway?" began Despard, politely.

"I am," answered the girl.

"I have come to ask if you don't want cosier quarters. I have noticed that where you are you often find yourself exposed to inclement weather."

Nell smiled.

"It is only for a short time," she said. "You may know that my stock never lasts long, and that I miss the morning showers and the evening gusts."

Her manner was gentle, but firm, and her well-chosen words were a rebuff which pierced the thick cuticle of the New York sharp.

"I can relieve you of much inconvenience if you will let me," he went on.

"Thank you. Your kindness is very flattering, but I shall have to decline it, because I am content where I am."

Despard was not repulsed.

"Your mother lives a long distance from your stand," he continued.

"I have no mother," she remarked, with a smile. "The lady who let you in is Mrs. Holystone, my landlady. I am quite alone in New York, but," with a sparkle in her eyes, "one does not want for friends on that account."

"The very reason why I feel like repeating my offer," said Despard. "I did not think you would refuse a little assistance prompted by the best of motives. I am very sorry. Can't I be of some service to you?"

"I am afraid not," returned Nell, well knowing that this man, with a younger friend, had watched her covertly for some time. "My refusal is final. I do not need assistance."

"Confound her! she is as troublesome to attack as a hedgehog!" growled Despard under his breath. "I am not going to give up the battle yet. There's too much at stake, and this girl shall not spoil the game by a display of coolness."

He threw a rapid glance toward the door before he resumed, and when he spoke again, he was standing before Nell, his dark eyes fixed on her face.

"You don't want to run about after night," he said in low tones.

Nell flushed to the temples. "What is that, sir?" she exclaimed, stepping back and meeting his look with one full of indignation. "Did you come here to insult me at home?"

"Insult, is it? ha, ha!" laughed Despard.

"I am seldom abroad after dark."

"Why, you were out last night."

"That is true. It was dark before I returned from the place where I board."

"Is that all, Nelly?" grinned the city sharp.

"Were you nowhere else?"

All at once the girl thought that this man may have followed her to the wharf. She did not look for spies on the journey, but his words and mien indicated that he knew something about the trip.

"If I were out last night, and you knew it, I was watched!" she exclaimed. "I did not think I had a spy at my heels! After this I shall look out for you."

"I said nothing about myself," replied Despard.

"I can draw my own conclusions, I presume," retorted the girl. "Let us fully understand one another. A man who will watch a young woman during the day, will not hesitate to play spy at night. This interview need not be prolonged. I have some business with my newspaper people, and I wish to be punctual."

Nell intended that her reply should be final, and with the last word on her lips, she made a movement which emphasized her desire.

"You will hear me a moment," cried Despard, shutting his lips hard. "I am not used to

being treated thus, and by a newspaper girl. Look here, Miss Nell. I am in a position to make things almighty uncomfortable for you unless you tell me why you went down to Baldy's last night, and what business you had with that young wharf rat who is gnawing holes into other people's granaries."

The eyes of the New York girl instantly got a look that surprised Despard.

"You threaten me, do you?" she exclaimed. "You were playing spy last night! Your friend got knocked into the gutter just as he deserved, and as usual, the police took the wrong person. But he is at liberty ere this, and ready to settle some more old debts, one against you, Daniel Despard."

Newspaper Nell had not forgotten the name she had heard Brandon pronounce at the boarding-house, and she was forced to smile at the effect produced on Despard when she spoke it.

"What is the name you just applied to me?" he asked.

"Daniel Despard!" repeated the girl. "You have a dozen names no doubt, but you see that one at least is known to me. I think it fits you well, sir."

"Oh well, call me what you will!" he ejaculated with a cutting sneer. "It does not break the force of my words, nor rob me of an iota of my power. You can league yourself with the vermin of the docks, but I will hold the winning cards at the end of the game!"

"Very well, Mr. Despard. You need not have come here to tell me this."

"Oh, you can show your blood, but blood doesn't win now," he laughed. "When you see the Dodger, will you tell him that the hand he slipped through last night will hold him in the end?"

"I will tell him!" cried Newspaper Nell. "Is that the only message, sir?"

Despard bit his lip at her coolness.

"Tell the safe-robber, Brandon, that he wants to keep away from his old friends Dan and Roy. We know too much, and he doesn't want to go up the Hudson for a long term where men have little freedom and no enjoyment, by Jove, no! ha! ha!"

"Look out for yourself while you warn others, Dan Despard," cried Nell.

"What do you mean?"

He took a mad stride toward the girl who straightened before him, and met him calmly, look for look.

"Play the game out and discover what I mean," she went on.

"You don't know anything!" he said.

There was no answer.

"Tell all you know! I don't care!" he hissed.

"A newspaper witch isn't going to wreck anybody's fortunes. But, mind you, Nelly, look out for number one as you go along. Go and settle with your newspaper people. You will not try to play against me when you come back to sober second thought. You can't afford to do it, girl! By Jupiter, you cannot!"

His face, flushed with rage, almost touched hers while he gave vent to the last sentences.

The next moment he was at the door, and as the girl still made no answer but gave him a look of defiance, he ground a curse between his teeth, opened the portal, and rushed out.

A smile passed over Newspaper Nell's face when she heard the front door bang behind him, and then she walked to a little mirror and surveyed herself for a moment.

"Dodger Dick played a fair estimate on that villain last night," she murmured. "I have yet to learn why he and the man called Roy have been watching me. There is a deep, dark scheme of some kind uppermost in their minds, and I am to be one of the victims if they do not fail."

The newspaper girl left the house, but did not come back after dinner as was her wont.

The afternoon came, but no young girl sold papers at Wall and Broadway.

Her regular customers wondered what had become of her, and bought their afternoon reading of some one else.

Night came.

A boy rung the bell of the plain brick house in the side street, and Mrs. Hollystone said that Nell had not been home since morning.

"In the trap, for a thousand!" cried the boy, who was Dodger Dick.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DODGER STEPS BETWEEN.

ANGUS BRANDON passed an uncomfortable night in the station-house. He did not regret the blow which had sent Elroy Surface into the gutter; but he was much concerned about Nell, in whom he had taken considerable interest.

He was fearful that the young rascal had followed her home, if he had not subjected her to insult; and he promised himself to find out at the first opportunity, and to show Dan Despard's companion that the girl had a champion able to protect her.

What was Brandon's surprise when he was summoned into the office of the station, and there confronted with Dodger Dick?

The wharf ferret and the officers about the place seemed on the best of terms, and when Brandon told the story of the street encounter, and the Dodger showed Roy up in his true light, the prisoner of the night was discharged.

"Now," said Dick to his friend, "Roy Surface and his friend Despard know that you are still on hand, and they won't stop at anything. Those two larks have a deep scheme afoot, and Nell is to be dragged into it. I followed Despard last night, as you know, and picked up some important information. I want to-day for work in another direction. You are to keep shady, but at eight to-night I will join you at the old bench in Battery place."

"I'll be there," assured Brandon, eagerly.

"If you happen to run across either of the pards, don't give yourself away. Let them think, if they will, that you have been sent to the Island. We'll give them a surprise later on."

"It was almost eight o'clock when Dodger Dick learned at Mrs. Hollystone's door that Newspaper Nell had been missing all day.

The thought that followed the startling information through his mind was a natural one.

If the girl had fallen into the clutches of Despard and Roy Surface, woe to them, thought the young detective!

The Dodger had his engagement to keep with Brandon, and not long after his discovery of Nell's absence, he appeared in the Park, on the lookout for his friend.

He walked straight to the bench near which he had first encountered the young man, and when near it he halted suddenly, and then stepped into the shadow of a tree.

The bench had occupants, a man and a woman, and the former was Angus Brandon himself.

"One of his old acquaintances," muttered Dick. "He must have had a time with Roy Surface before they got him down to their level. Ah! the woman is going to leave. She isn't in a happy frame of mind, and Brandon seems to be talking through his teeth."

The Dodger could see the couple with distinctness, for they were quite near, and the trees did not interfere.

"Great heavens! it is the woman whom I tracked to Tenth street with Despard last night!" so duly continued the boy. "Is she the person who has been blackmailing Brandon?" And then, as the couple had moved toward him, he heard the young man say:

"No more blood from me, I tell you."

"Very well. You will have to put up with the consequences, be they what they may," was the answer.

Brandon laughed bitterly.

"You may think that my hands have been forever tied by the crime of the store," he said, looking straight into Thalia's eyes. "I am not afraid to face all the information you threaten to impart to the public. What am I, anyhow?—A person who has been sleeping in the parks, a man whose life has been rendered desperate by the shadow of a crime which was not all his! I will not disguise any thing. You come from the brace of rascals who pulled me down step by step until I was ready to do their work. You have hounded me like a sleuth ever since that night. You bled me when I had obtained a respectable position; you put your hands again into my pockets until, to escape you, I flew to the streets—I became a beggar! Now, I say, do your worst. I laugh in your face. But I add, while I tell you this, that the victim may turn on the hunter one of these days. You can carry your infamous scheme a little too far. I have no position to lose now. You can't whisper into an employer's ear. Ha! ha! my queen of blackmailers, it does me good to tell you this. Go back to your companions and tell them that the golden well is dry. You don't like it, I see. Well, I can't help it. Good-night, madam. The treasury is empty—Good-night!"

The Dodger saw the eyes of the woman glitter like a serpent's. He noticed her draw back, throw a quick look around, and then lean suddenly toward Brandon.

"You dare not turn on me!" she hissed.

"Try me and see!" smiled the young man.

"You shall not!" was the quick retort.

Brandon turned coolly and walked away.

For a moment Thalia eyed him with tigerish

glare, then all at once her hand dropped to her pocket, but instantly came up again.

Dodger Dick who saw all this sprung from his tree, and with an agile bound, placed himself between Thalia and the young clerk.

Brandon happened to look back at that moment, saw the wharf spy, and turned.

Thalia stopped.

"That is the spy I saw at the house last night," she thought. "Dodger Dick is Angus Brandon's friend."

There was a smile of victory on the boy's countenance when he encountered Thalia's look, and as Brandon came forward, the woman slipped away and vanished.

"You've had company," exclaimed Dick.

"The leech that used to bleed me!" was the reply and Brandon looked after Thalia, but saw her not. "I told her awhile ago," he went on, "that the jig was up, and she now knows that my purse will open no more when she pulls the strings."

"She can show her teeth, Brandon."

"That she can!" laughed the young man. "I did not want to attract attention, and when I saw that she was going to have a scene, I walked away. She is Dan Despard's friend, and got all her cues from him."

Although Thalia had disappeared, she was not very far away, and at that moment her sparkling black eyes saw Brandon and Dick.

"Despard has got to crush that boy!" came from between her teeth. "We can't succeed till it has been done. He must execute no partial play, either. The snake must be killed, not scotched."

She continued to watch the pair until they moved away.

"I'll find him now," she went on, as she started off.

The following second she was touched by a human hand; and turning half-way around with a start, she looked into the smiling face of the very man she wanted, Despard.

"A little too late in one sense, but just in the nick of time, for all!" exclaimed Thalia. "Let us walk this way. I want to show you somebody. He has not left the Battery. What! won't you go?"

"I think I know whom you have seen," replied the city sharp. "I do not want him to see me just now nor here."

"Are you afraid of a boy?" exclaimed Thalia.

"Don't go off in an explosion of passion," smiled Despard. "When I fear a boy, I'll turn parson. I say I don't want the young imp to see me just now, and that is true. I want you to play a big hand up-town to-night. I have just come from the house, where I told Ione that I'd find you here, trying to get a dollar out of the man you have bled so well."

"I did try it, but the purse was empty!" laughed Thalia. "I made a discovery though."

"Well?"

"Dodger Dick and Angus Brandon are friends."

"That is nothing very new. The young wharf rat got him out of the station this morning. Did the pair go off together?"

"Yes; they are barely out of sight now."

"Let them go. Roy and I have held a council and decided that we must make the first move to-night."

"Must I play the hand?"

"Yes."

"Come, then!" cried Thalia, in an outburst of eagerness. "I have always told you that I could manage this affair, and I will show you that I can do more than bleed a young clerk. Is the girl, the fly the web caught to-day, perfectly safe?"

"Safe as a real fly in a trap of steel!" was the response.

"Then I am willing to let Brandon and the Dodger go; but we must not forget to catch the wharf Norway."

"In time—in good time, Thalia!" laughed Despard.

The city tiger and his friend walked from the spot, and passed from the Park.

Not far behind them glided a figure that kept in the shadows, and which did not let them for a moment get beyond sight.

Despard and Thalia took a cab for the house on Tenth street. Both alighted in front of it and went in, and the cab waited at the curb.

A few minutes later the pair came out and were driven away.

"Don't forget anything," whispered Despard to the woman, who leaned back in the vehicle, a gleam of intense eagerness in the depths of her eyes.

"Not a mite!" came the answer. "I am

burning to make the first play. I won't fall a dollar. He shall know that unless he pays our price, he will be stripped of his wealth, if he does not enter the Bastille on the Hudson. You did your work to-day, Dan Despard; I will do mine to-night!"

The cab rattled on, out of one street and into another.

It was moving up-town and toward a district inhabited by the wealthy.

It pulled up at last in front of one of a number of fine houses, and Thalia got out.

"Remember! Not a cent less than one hundred thousand, cash in hand," said Despard, in a low voice, his fingers at the woman's wrist.

"I'll not forget!"

The succeeding moment Thalia tripped lightly up the stone steps and rung the bell.

Despard watched her from the darkness of the cab that waited.

In a little while the door of the mansion opened and shut.

Thalia was inside!

"I'd like to see her play," exclaimed Despard. "But I have no fears. Thalia is the coolest and shrewdest woman in New York. Merle Mallot will soon find this out!"

CHAPTER IX. IN THE TRAP.

EXPECTING no visitor at that hour, much less one like the person who had just rung his bell, Merle Mallot was at his desk in the library.

When Hetty, the housemaid who replied to the ring, told him that a woman desired to see him, he gave orders for his visitor to be admitted.

A moment later Merle Mallot stood face to face with Thalia, whom he now saw for the first time.

"Well, madam," began the ex-merchant in a business-like voice, "what can I do for you?"

Thalia threw a rapid glance around the room, as if to make sure that they were alone.

"You need not fear to talk," continued Mallot, interpreting the look as he caught it. "We are quite alone here, and will not be disturbed."

"Thanks! I have called on private business, and you will appreciate my desire that we have no eavesdroppers," and Thalia smiled.

"Private business! What can this woman want?" thought the merchant.

"Some time ago, Mr. Mallot, you lost some papers, which, I believe, you consider important," resumed the woman.

Merle Mallot started.

"What do you know about them?" he cried.

"Nothing, perhaps; a good deal if necessary," was the reply.

"You know that I lost some papers. This tells me that you also know something about them."

"That depends," answered Thalia, in the mysterious manner she had assumed. "When people lose anything of value to them, they ardently desire its return. As I have said, Mr. Mallot, I am here on business. What are you willing to pay for the return of those papers?"

Merle Mallot looked into Thalia's face till his look became a stare.

He had seen enough of humanity to know that his visitor was as cool and calculating as she was beautiful. Her intensely black eyes betrayed her character, which he could read far enough to show that he was dealing with no ordinary person.

"This woman comes direct from the man who robbed me," passed through the merchant's brain. "She is the go-between through whom Angus Brandon hopes to rake the golden chestnuts from the fire. I've said I would listen to no compromise from him; but I must have those papers. I must get them back!"

"Are you authorized to negotiate with me?" he asked Thalia.

"I am. I came hither for that purpose."

"The papers are not so very important," said Mallot, assuming an air of indifference. "I can get along very well without them."

"It all lies with you," was the quick response.

"You are the purchaser. Do as you think best. The papers will not be destroyed, however."

The last remark, spoken for a certain purpose, seemed to bring the New York nabob to terms.

"What do you think they are worth to me?" he asked.

"A right nice little figure. I should say about one hundred thousand dollars."

Thalia named the amount in an off-hand manner, as though she were familiar with large sums.

"My God, woman! Do you want to bankrupt me?" cried Merle Mallot.

"On the contrary, I wish to keep you from bankruptcy," was the calm reply. "The sum I have named is not large compared with your well-known resources. You are worth a million at least, and can afford to buy the papers mentioned a while ago."

"I don't want them at that figure," said the merchant. "I can't rob my child to purchase a few old papers which really amount to nothing."

Quick as thought almost a smile appeared at Thalia's lips, and her eyes seemed to get a new light as she leaned toward Merle Mallot.

"A few old papers which amount to nothing, eh?" she repeated, while she looked him in the face. "You know better than that, Merle Mallot. You wouldn't have the history of those papers brought to light for ten times the sum I have named. If you say you will not purchase at the price mentioned, our business is concluded, and the next move will follow."

"What will the next move be?"

"The production of the person mentioned most prominently in those papers."

Merle Mallot moved uneasily in his chair.

"I do not understand you," said he.

"Need I make it plainer? Then, let me say that the child, Florette, is alive."

"Impossible!" cried Mallot, losing color despite his secret resolve to do nothing of the kind.

"Wait and see," smiled Thalia. "You are likely to have served on you within a short time a legal paper which will drag you into the courts, and then the reporters will get to sharpen their pencils over a romance in real life. I did not think you wanted the past opened, Merle Mallot. Florette is ready to step forward and claim her own, and you know how much that is to-day. I thought you would be in a purchasable mood, but you want litigation, I see. It shall be yours since you seek it. I have no choice."

"Have you the papers with you?"

"Oh, no," laughed Thalia. "They are too valuable to bring to you before a bargain has been struck."

The merchant bit his lip. The woman was too much for him.

"You won't buy, so I will go," she went on, leaving her chair. "I won't come again, Mr. Mallot. You have been given a chance. Florette will appear on the scene now."

Merle Mallot saw Thalia standing before him with the dignity of a queen.

"I don't want to be robbed," he exclaimed.

"You ask too much, entirely too much, for the papers."

"Not a dollar less will be taken."

"He sent you to me, did he not?"

"Of whom do you speak?"

"I mean the young thief who violated my confidence before he had been six months in my employ," said Mallot, bitterly.

"I came from no such person," repeated Thalia.

"Is it possible?"

"I came from the papers—from Florette," she went on.

"If I buy the former at your price, will the latter never appear?"

"She will never bother you."

"If we can't agree to-night, she will push her claim, will she?"

"To the end!" came sternly over Thalia's lips. "This is no child's play, Merle Mallot. The girl will be recognized by those who often saw her mother, and the papers, which I am surprised you never destroyed, will complete her cause. It all lies in your hands. Listen to compromise and live unmolested; refuse, and have the past aired in the New York courts."

"I call this black-mail," exclaimed Mallot. "I think I need not let myself be frightened out of one hundred thousand dollars."

Thalia did not lose her temper.

"Very well; if you want exposure, it shall come," she said calmly. "The money which your first partner left to you in trust for his daughter, has more than trebled itself. You have used it as the stepping stone to immense wealth. Do you want this in the courts, Merle Mallot? Do you want several other dark tricks exposed to the searching light of justice? I ask you whether you want an old man, once called Jerry Dunn, to mount the stand?"

Merle Mallot started up with a cry he could not suppress.

It was Thalia's last shot, and she had kept it in the locker until it was needed.

There was now not a vestige of color on the merchant's face, and the woman, standing off, watched him with triumphant eyes.

"You see we are not unprepared for the attack," she continued.

"I can have all of you sent up for burglary!"

"With the papers and Florette in our hands?" laughed Thalia. "Now, you would not try that, Mr. Mallot! I think we hold a hand equal to any you can obtain. The girl is very eager to get her own, and she wants to see the doors of Sing Sing open for a certain person. So she says, Merle Mallot. There will be enough left for your own child."

"Enough till you come again."

"We sell you the papers. We give the game over to you, for one hundred thousand, cash in hand."

"To be paid where and when?"

"Within twenty-four hours and at a place that will be designated hereafter."

"Give me a little time for reflection," begged Mallot.

"How much do you want?"

"Several hours at least."

"Take them. Insert your decision in one of the morning papers in a 'personal' addressed to 'Business.' If you accept the proposition, say, 'Accepted,' and sign anything you wish to the personal. If you decline, insert nothing in the paper. We will then know that you throw out a challenge. You will do this?"

Mallot made a faint reply in a voice entirely unlike his natural tones, and Thalia drew back.

A minute later she said good-night to the pale merchant, and he fell back in his chair, while she went down to the eager and impatient man, waiting for her in the carriage at the curb.

"In God's name, has it come to this?" groaned Mallot, as he staggered across the room to the window while the vehicle moved into the street. "Is the girl alive, and have they found Jerry Dunn whom I have not seen for seventeen years? I am in their power unless I can overthrow the gang. What can my boy spotter do against this infamous league? I dare not tell him about the past. Gods, no! I must have the papers! Give me them, and I'll laugh at the foe. Where is my young fox?"

At that moment the bell rung, and Mallot looked breathless toward the door while he waited for the visitor.

It opened and revealed Dodger Dick.

"Look here," cried the merchant, seizing the boy instantly. "I must have my papers within twenty-four hours."

CHAPTER X. NIGHT WORK.

"WITHIN twenty-four hours?" echoed the wharf detective, looking into Merle Mallot's face still without color. "Something has happened."

"Yes, something has happened," responded the ex-merchant through his teeth.

He did not choose to give the Dodger the particulars of Thalia's visit, though the boy waited several minutes for him to say something about it.

"You've had a visitor, Mr. Mallot," finally said Dick.

"Ah, do you know?"

"I guess I can see some things when my eyes are open," grinned the dock shadow. "Did she know very much?"

"She knows a good deal. Didn't a carriage wait for her below?"

"Yes."

"Was it occupied?"

"It was."

"By whom?"

The merchant's voice as well as his looks betrayed his eagerness.

"A man waited for her in the vehicle," continued the Dodger.

"Was it Argus Brandon, my thief nephew?"

"It was not!" exclaimed the boy. "The man was the woman's companion in the scheme. When she entered the cab she whispered several words of congratulation, and away they went. Look here! did you let that New York serpent carry her point?"

"I did not and she never shall! I wish you had followed them. They will go back to my papers, and to a certain person they claim to have in their possession. I want those papers within twenty-four hours. Put them in my hands, and I can defy the league against me. I was basely threatened to-night and in my own house, too. Do you think you can win the battle within that time?"

Dodger Dick was shrewd enough to see that Merle Mallot was keeping something back.

"I can't tell you till I know something about the woman's visit. You must have given her some encouragement, for why did she say to the man in the cab: 'To-morrow's paper will prove the victory,' What does that mean?"

The merchant did not reply for a moment. "Pshaw! a few dollars will buy this boy," he said to himself. "I need not tell him all, but he ought to know what I promised about the 'personal' in the papers. His advice might be worth something."

Then he proceeded and told the Dodger something about Thalia's visit. The boy detective listened intently from the depths of the chair in which he had seated himself.

Merle Mallot chose his words as he proceeded, for he was on important ground.

When he finished he saw the Dodger's countenance brighten.

"You want to send the 'personal' to the papers," he said. "Write it out, and I will take it down-town."

The merchant gave Dodger Dick a look of surprise.

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

"Certainly I do."

"But I am not to pay them one hundred thousand for my papers?"

"Aren't they cheap at that?" inquired Dick, with a smile.

"Yes—no! no! I don't want to compromise with the gang. If I give them a chance—if I yield now—I will be forever black-mailed. That woman is a professional."

"And the man, too," observed the young spotter. "Write out the personal. I'll take it down to the counting-room."

"Is this policy?"

"I think it is."

Merle Mallot went over to his desk and wrote for a minute, watched the while by the Dodger.

"The game is fairly on," the boy murmured. "Those papers held over Merle Mallot's head would finally drive him mad. It is not hard to see that Dan Despard and his pals wanted the papers for a certain purpose, and he and Roy Surface have not been watching Newspaper Nell for nothing. Somehow or other the girl is mixed up in their big scheme to rake in a fortune; Nell's mysterious disappearance is proof of that. I don't care so much about Merle Mallot since I've heard how he treated Brandon after he had made his losses good. He hasn't been exactly straight all his life, and I'm likely to find something out before I get to the end of this string."

By this time Mallot had finished his work, and a moment later he placed the following "personal" in the Dodger's hands:

"BUSINESS—Accepted. Name time and place. 40th St."

"That will do," remarked Dodger Dick, glancing up at Mallot. "I will see that it appears in to-morrow's issues. It tells just enough, and will put them in high spirits."

"But you are to get the papers, understand. I am not to be bled by the gang."

The boy nodded.

Once more Merle Mallot was alone in his sumptuous rooms, but the old color did not come back.

"If I knew whether Jerry Dunn was alive to appear against me, or whether he is really dead, as I had believed for years—I say if I could become satisfied on this point, I would know how to proceed. Let me see. I used to have the record."

He went back to his desk in the library and hunted through its papers a long time.

At last he found a slip cut from a newspaper, and holding it near the light, he read it with a good deal of interest.

"That is it!" he exclaimed. "It says that Jerry Dunn was run over by a butcher's wagon five years ago, and that he died from his injuries. I'll admit that these newspaper reporters don't know everything, but, as I never saw old Jerry after the accident, I had a right to conclude that he was dead. Now, the woman who was here to-night asks me how I'd like to have him mount the witness-stand. I don't believe it! It was a scheme to scare me into the trap. Jerry Dunn is as dead as a herring!"

Merle Mallot put the cutting back into the desk, and glanced at his watch.

Already Dodger Dick was hurrying down-town.

"I know where Jerry used to live," murmured Mallot. "He had a friend who lives there yet, for I saw him in the basement door not three weeks ago. If Jerry is alive he will know it."

The following minute Merle Mallot picked up his hat, and stole on tip-toe into the hall.

It was not common for him to leave the house at night. Since his retirement from business, he

seldom went out at any time, and his secretiveness gave rise to some strange rumors about him.

He walked rapidly to a corner not far from his home and took the Elevated cars.

During the ride down-town he was uneasy, as if he counted the minutes.

When he alighted, he was in a certain quarter of the city where wealthy men do not transact business after dark. Merle Mallot had come thither for a purpose, and in a little while he was gliding along in the shadows of the buildings as much as possible.

He was unconscious of the fact that he had a spy at his heels.

If he had looked back he might have seen the well-dressed young man who had seen him come down the stairs of the 'L' depot.

Merle Mallot kept on until he reached a certain basement where there was a light in the window.

"This is the place," he said to himself, and down the steps he went, and knocked at the door.

A youngish man opened it, evidently not the person Mallot had come to see.

The merchant was taken aback.

"What has become of the old man who lived here several weeks ago?" asked Mallot, politely declining the invitation to enter.

"He is dead, sir."

"Dead? Wasn't it sudden?"

"Somewhat, sir. He was run down by a horse-cart and had his neck broken. Did you want to see him?"

"I did, but never mind."

"I moved in here from next door," volunteered the young man.

"Then you may have known Jerry Dunn."

"That's just what I did. He's been dead—let me see—"

"About five years?" helped the merchant.

"You're right! Hit by a butcher's wagon, wasn't he?"

Mallot nodded.

"I helped to lay old Jerry out," continued the garrulous young fellow, much to Mallot's satisfaction. "He didn't die for some time after the accident. I recollect that he was several times called on by a fine-looking stranger, a city sport, I always thought."

"What was his name?" inquired the merchant, with a slight start.

"I don't know, but I heard old Jerry call him Dan several times before he died. After Jerry was dead, the man looked the house over as if he had a right to."

Merle Mallot made no reply, and seeing that the young man had told all he knew, he pressed a dollar upon him and withdrew.

Again he had the spy at his heels, and when he entered the cars to return home, he was watched until the train moved.

"If he wants to find old Jerry Dunn, he won't find him above ground!" laughed the spy, going back to the street. "Merle Mallot is full of curiosity to-night. But we've got a firm grip on his purse-strings; and he shall never know what it is to be a free man. I always told Dan there was a million in the scheme, and I believe it."

Not far from where the spy had lost Merle Mallot, a man suddenly touched his shoulder and drew from him a cry of recognition.

"We've made a ten-strike to-night, 'Roy!' exclaimed one of the men whose handsome face proclaimed him Dan Despard, the city tiger.

"What was it?"

"I can answer you best by showing you something," was the reply. "I was in big luck a few minutes ago. This time the river eel did not slip through my fingers."

'Roy Surface, who was the spy at Mallot's heels, followed Despard around a corner and up a flight of stairs into the second-story of a building.

Despard unlocked a door, and turning on the gas, pointed to a cot in one corner of the room.

"Look for yourself, 'Roy," he said.

The young sport went forward and bent over the bed.

"It is Dodger Dick!" he cried, and Despard laughed with the sarcastic glee of a fiend.

CHAPTER XI.

DICK IN THE SNARE.

'Roy, the young sport, knew the occupant of the cot at a glance.

"How did this happen?" he exclaimed, wheeling upon Despard.

"I caught him when I wasn't looking for a prize of the kind," was the answer. "Do you think he'll slip through my fingers any more, 'Roy?"

'Roy Surface thought not. He knew Dan

Despard, for much of his life had been passed in the city tiger's company, and he was aware that he had no mercy, and pursued a foe to the bitter end.

Dodger Dick had met with misfortune in a singular and unexpected manner, and we can retrace our steps from this point to witness it.

When the young wharf spy left Merle Mallot's house, he carried, as we already know, the "personal" which the merchant intended should be inserted in several morning papers that it might meet the eyes of Dan Despard and his confederate Thalia.

The Dodger went straight down town intent on the business in hand.

Despard and Thalia in the cab were some distance ahead of him, and he had no thought of encountering either very soon. Dick intended to deliver the "personal" at several newspaper offices, and then began an active search for Newspaper Nell, taking up a certain incident which he thought might be worked into a clew.

The illuminated dial that stands high above the trees of City Hall Park told that the hour was getting late when the Dodger finished his errand.

He did not know that a man had seen him emerge from the counting room of the last newspaper building, nor did he dream that Dan Despard the New York sport was on the watch.

Dodger Dick walked away with certain plans crystallizing in his brain.

The streets that throng with busy thousands during the day, had fewer pedestrians now, but one of these was stealing upon the young detective with the stealth of a jungle cat.

Suddenly Dick felt a hand on his shoulder; it tightened before he could turn his head, and the grip became like the merciless grasp of a steel vise.

"You don't want to squeal!" whispered a voice at the boy's ear. "You've been fairly caught and I don't intend to have any trouble with you."

One look into the face of the speaker was enough for the dock shadow, for it showed him the features of Despard, the city tiger.

"You've no right to hold me!" exclaimed Dick, drawing back just enough to test the sport's grip.

"No right, eh?" grinned Despard. "Come, my young ferret. You're sharp enough to know that I wouldn't bag you for nothing. Walk right along with me, and make no noise." And he started off, his look and grasp admonishing the Dodger that it would be policy to keep pace with him, and with a silent tongue in his head.

At length Despard boarded an almost empty car going up town.

Dick was forced to accompany him. The sport's hand had been transferred from the boy's shoulder to his wrist where the fingers seemed to burn their way to the bones.

He sat between the Dodger and the rear door of the car, and all the time watched him with the eye of a hawk.

The few passengers who got on and off did not suspect the relations existing between the pair, though good eyes would have noticed the manacle of flesh and bone.

The car kept on till Dick's journey to prison seemed interminable.

Despard said nothing, but his keen dark eyes were on the watch, and the Dodger's chances of escape dwindled away.

The city sport left the car on Bleeker street.

"Hal!" thought Dick. "He is going to the room to which, as Burt Bluster, I promised to bring Mother Sturgeon's address."

In a little while Despard dragged his little prisoner into a darkened hallway and then up a flight of steps.

Nothing was said until a door on the first landing had been unlocked, and the Dodger found himself in a small but tolerably well furnished room.

Despard locked the door behind him.

"You weren't looking for me?" he exclaimed as Dick recovered his breath.

"Why should I?" was the reply.

"Come away from that dodge! You need not play ignorance when I am onto the whole lay," laughed Despard. "They give you credit for a good deal of cunning, Dodger Dick; but I didn't think you'd let a non-professional pick you up in the street as I have done. Don't you know that some trails are dangerous for you?"

The boy said nothing for a moment, but looked into the Gotham tiger's face as if he were collecting his own thoughts while he tried to read it.

"I'll admit that I was caught napping," he said at last.

"I should say so!" chuckled Despard. "You have interested yourself in a matter which does not concern you. What does Merle Mallot pay for your services?"

"Merle Mallot?"

"Yes—the up-town nabob who hires a wharf ferret to find a lot of papers which he is very anxious to get his hands on! He's afraid to trust the Mulberry street shadows, eh, Dodger Dick?"

"That is not my concern," answered the boy boldly, for he saw that denial of his identity was useless in the presence of a man who knew him.

"Of course not. He knows that a big rat can't get into small holes. What are the prospects, my boy?"

Dick said nothing.

"Keep still if you want to," continued Despard with a smile. "Merle Mallot's boy shadow is not likely to deliver a very promising report. Because he has fallen into the hands of the enemy, you see."

"Yes, you are the enemy!" was the reply. "You are the man who entered Merle Mallot's residence and drugged him. I have not been on a false trail, Daniel Despard."

The man gave Dick a fierce look and leaned toward him.

"How did you first strike it? I'm curious to know," he said.

The boy seemed to draw back.

"Won't tell me, eh?" exclaimed the city sport, and his face instantly darkened. "Don't you see that you are in a trap which I control? Have a care, my young Norway of the docks. You are in the hands of Despard, who knows how to deal with spies and paid shadows."

The man left his chair and came toward the Dodger, who saw the inward flashes that illuminated his eyes.

"I guess I know you pretty well," the boy cried. "You've gained a reputation under several names, and 'Roy, your young pard, isn't far behind you in that respect."

"You know us all, by Jove!" and Despard bounded at the boy detective and caught him with both hands. "You slipped through my fingers when I thought I had you on Tenth street, but now the game is mine! You had better reigned king of the docks, my young trailer. This case is the last one you are to undertake, and Merle Mallot, who seems to have so much confidence in you, will never get to pay you the last wages."

"Maybe he will pay some one else to your detriment," came through the boy's teeth, while he looked up into the fiery eyes that hovered over him. "You need not think, Dan Despard, that I am alone on this trail."

"You have help, have you?" cried the city tiger. "Have you taken a partner in the person of the young safe-breaker who robbed his uncle before he was three months in his employ? He's a fit companion to watch people, sure enough. Why we could have sent him up the river, but out of pity for the poor wretch we let him go."

"It was all your work, but let that pass," replied the Dodger. "It was the beginning of the big scheme which, I presume, originated in your brain. The woman called Thalia helped the cause along. Forge ahead till the end comes. It isn't far away."

"Which means that you expect to render the scheme futile!" broke out Despard, his grip tightening on the Dodger till the fingers seemed to sink into the flesh. "As far as you're concerned, the hunt ends here, and the victory dreamed of never comes! I have never failed, Dodger Dick, and in my time I've had some pretty big schemes on my hands. When I catch a rat I never take him into the street to kill him, and thus give him half a dozen chances to get away. I finish the animal in secret, and to my satisfaction. So now, we'll begin the play."

The next moment, and with a movement which could not be anticipated, Despard's hands darted at the boy's throat, and the young detective was jerked from the floor without ceremony.

Resistance was useless though Dick tried to tear the hands away.

He felt a horrid sensation of choking taking possession of him, myriads of stars in wild confusion danced before his eyes, and the close of a frantic, but useless effort to free himself, rayless darkness came, and he knew no more!

For several moments Despard held the boy in the light and looked at his work.

"I guess the rat is done for!" he exclaimed. "I was lucky to-night. When I told Thalia that I would go down-town and look up 'Roy, I

had no thought of catching the troublesome dock shadow. Merle Mallot is without a trail-dog now, and the whole game is in our hands. What shall I do with this young night cat? He's fixed for all time, for my hands knew just what to do when they touched his throat. I'll leave him here for a spell. He'll not be gone when I come back."

Dodger Dick was borne across the room to a cot in one corner and tossed thereon with an expression of brutal triumph.

Then Despard stole from the place locking the door carefully behind him, and went out into the street.

Not long afterward he came back accompanied by 'Roy Surface whose discovery of the Dodger on the cot we have seen.

"There's nothing between us and the fortune now," exclaimed the young sport.

"Nothing that frightens me," was the answer. "Angus Brandon is no barrier at all, and Newspaper Nell, who might have baffled us, is safe enough. The trouble lies yonder, 'Roy, but I guess I have fixed it. With Dodger Dick out of the game, as he certainly is, I can almost feel my share of the million in my hands."

CHAPTER XII.

AN ASTONISHED FLASHER.

In the little room which Dodger Dick sometimes occupied at Baldy's, near the wharf, Angus Brandon, the young clerk, was waiting for the boy shadow.

It was the day that had followed the night of events, the night so disastrous to the Dodger.

Brandon knew nothing of these things, and while he waited for the wharf spy he thought of Newspaper Nell, whose disappearance was known to him.

The morning was well advanced, and as the sun crept higher, Brandon grew impatient.

What kept the Dodger?

"By Jupiter! if anything has happened to Dick, I should know it!" he exclaimed. "The woman who discovered in the water park that Dick and I were friends, is Dan Despard's confederate, and she may have put that rascal on the boy's track."

He resolved to wait no longer, and run a risk of doing the Dodger harm, by keeping indoors for his return to Baldy's.

He left the boarding-house, and plunged into the hurry of life and business that awaited him in the open air.

Thalia, the beautiful black-mailer, was not now on his trail, and when Brandon thought of her he shut his hands madly, and vowed that she had bled him for the last time.

An hour later the banished clerk stood on a corner watching the movements of a young man, the first sight of whom had sent hot blood rushing to his temples.

"You're not up to anything legitimate, 'Roy Surface," said Brandon to himself. "You never waste time walking back and forth past a certain house unless your interests are at stake in some way. That house is not your home, either."

Young Mr. Surface, the city flasher, did not see the sharp eyes that watched him. Brandon had chosen an excellent point of observation, one from which he could watch without great danger of being seen.

Not very far away 'Roy was walking up and down the sidewalk in a seemingly careless manner, but Brandon was shrewd enough to see that it meant more than mere pastime.

For some minutes walk and espionage were kept up, and in the end a man came out of the building that was guarded by 'Roy and walked away.

The young sport did not follow this person, as Brandon thought he would, but darted into the house, which was a cigar-store in front, and vanished.

Brandon wanted to follow 'Roy's example, but policy forbade, and he had to content himself where he was.

"It seems to me," he murmured, "that when I was in the clutches of Despard and 'Roy Surface, I used to visit a cigar store along here. The dealer and 'Roy were on the best of terms, but he was a fellow whose looks I never liked. If he owns the store in which 'Roy has disappeared, something crooked is in the air."

After a while, as the young sport did not come out, Brandon left his post and walked rapidly past the establishment.

The front room was empty, but in a second apartment beyond it, his searching eyes caught a glimpse of two figures; no doubt 'Roy and the cigar-dealer.

For some reason Surface had refused to enter the store while the man who had just left was there.

This indicated to Brandon that his errand was not an honest one.

The young clerk did not desert the place. On the contrary he remained in the vicinity keeping an eye on it, and eagerly waiting for the city flasher.

'Roy came out at last and rather suddenly.

There was a look of triumph on his face, and Brandon could see that he had accomplished some object in which he was deeply interested.

"Now for a race, I presume," chuckled Brandon, as he started off after the sport, who walked rapidly off without looking around to see whether he was followed. "If he doesn't force me to take a car, I shall be satisfied, but, at all events, I am not going to lose sight of my quarry."

Brandon was right when he concluded that he was to have a chase after his old companion.

'Roy seemed to be in search of a goal some distance away, and was not willing to trust himself on the street cars that particular morning.

The tracker kept him in sight despite his rapid walk and the crowds of people already astir.

When 'Roy turned into Bleecker street an exclamation of wonder escaped Brandon's lips.

"Can he be going to the house to which Despard told Dodger Dick to carry Mother Sturgeon's address when the boy palmed himself off on him as Burt Bluster?" exclaimed the young clerk. "Dick told me the whole story and the number, so I will know it if 'Roy enters the place."

Sure enough, in a little while, the New York flasher darted into a hallway and Brandon at the same moment saw that the house was Number —, the same mentioned by Dick, of the dock.

As the chase had ended for the present at least, Brandon had nothing to do but to watch the premises and to wait for 'Roy's reappearance.

He did not wait long.

All at once the young sport rushed out of the place, his face considerably flushed, and his eyes filled with excitement.

"Something has gone wrong!" thought Brandon, while he watched 'Roy, who had halted undecided on the sidewalk. "The chappy looks like he did not find things to suit him in the place. He is bewildered."

Mr. Elroy Surface was more than bewildered; he was thunderstruck.

"Confound it all! I wonder if the captain came back!" exclaimed 'Roy. "That wasn't the understanding—not by a long shot! I couldn't have missed the room, for I've been there fifty times."

He looked up at the house, then up and down the street, bewildered still as much as a man could be.

"I've got to find Despard!" he cried, starting off like an arrow lanced from a bow. "If he doesn't know anything about this, the wheel of fortune has stopped at the wrong notch for us, condemn me if it hasn't!"

Brandon could not help smiling at 'Roy's seeming eagerness to make time, and plunged after him with zest added to the mystery that surrounded the new pursuit.

Since the personal encounter between the two young men, Brandon, at Dick's suggestion, had divested his face of the set of whiskers he usually wore, and the change had considerably altered his appearance.

'Roy went straight to the nearest Elevated station, and Brandon, with hat-brim pulled down over his brows, bravely followed.

"To the end, Mr. Surface!" ejaculated the young clerk. "I am in for the war, as you see! The Dodger would give me credit for this chase if he could witness it."

The cars took both 'Roy and his follower to the station nearest the house occupied by Thalia and Ione.

The young man's excitement had not much abated, and Brandon, seeming absorbed in a paper, saw that he was eager to reach his destination.

The second chase ended exactly where Brandon expected it to end.

'Roy, the flasher, entered a fine-looking house on Tenth street, and the young clerk was brought to a halt.

He could not follow his prey beyond the door, and the spot was not one easily watched without danger of being seen.

If Brandon could have entered the house at 'Roy's heels, he would have seen him suddenly confront a beautiful girl who greeted him with an exclamation of joy.

"Where is Captain Despard?" cried 'Roy, repulsing the girl's demonstrations of delight.

"He is not here."

"And Thalia?"

"Absent also. But what is the matter, 'Roy?"

Ione had noticed the excitement the young man could not keep down.

There was no answer.

"Something has happened!" she cried. "Has fortune taken a turn against us just when we almost feel the fortune in our palms? I don't want to be beaten now with all the work done. Think of the training I have gone through. I am fitted to play the heiress to perfection. Why, Thalia even declares that I am Newspaper Nell, without the rough edges that girl has."

'Roy had been thrown into bad humor by not finding Despard or Thalia in the house.

He did not seem to hear the girl.

"When will they be back?" he asked.

"Before long. If you will wait here—"

"All day, perhaps? I can't afford to!" snapped 'Roy. "Yes, Ione, something has happened."

The girl instantly lost color.

"I've feared it would! To-morrow we are to rake in the fortune. To-morrow we are to get Merle Mallot's money, for Newspaper Nell is safe, and that boy spy, Dodger Dick, as they call him—"

"Well, what about him?" grinned 'Roy leaning toward the girl.

"Why, he is out of the way forever!"

The city flasher fell back and laughed.

"Who told you this?" he suddenly asked.

"Despard," answered Ione.

"When?"

"Early this morning."

"Ah! he was here since last night?"

"Yes."

"Well, Ione, there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, and I fear this is one of them."

The beautiful girl uttered a long cry and staggered from 'Roy like a person in agony.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LOST NEWSGIRL.

"THERE'S nothing for me here," thought 'Roy Surface. "I don't want this girl to go on in my presence, and probably give the scheme away to some one else in the house. I'll get away," and he moved toward the door.

But Ione, who had dropped into a chair, was up and at him like a beautiful leopard.

"You've got to tell me all—everything, and that before you get away from here!" she exclaimed, springing between him and the door.

"You have confessed that something has happened, a slip 'twixt cup and lip, you call it. Now, sir, what is it? Is the fortune in danger?"

'Roy could not help admiring the beauty of the girl who confronted him in such excitement.

He knew that without her the deep-laid scheme for one hundred thousand and more would probably fail.

"It may not be much after all, Ione," he answered, with a smile, intended to be reassuring.

"You can't deceive me. You let out a little too much awhile ago."

"You are easily frightened, a shadow makes you tremble. Have courage, Ione."

The girl seemed to take hope.

"It is not much, then?" she asked.

"It is nothing."

"I am to be rich after all?" And her eyes sparkled.

"A queen of gold."

"Good! I won't have to play the missing heiress long. But, 'Roy, if the girl should get away, if Newspaper Nell should discover who she is, and place her cause in the hands of the right parties—"

"Don't conjure up something that cannot happen," interrupted the young flasher. "You are the child of Merle Mallot's first partner, the child supposed by the up-town nabob to be dead. Don't you see, Ione?"

"Yes, yes."

"Old Jerry Dunn told Despard the whole story before he could die in peace. We had to discover the real heir before we could play you for a trump card. Now that we've got everything in our hands, a few little things are not going to balk us."

"How sanguine you are!" exclaimed the girl.

"Why should I not be? You will let me go now, won't you, Ione?"

The girl drew back and let 'Roy to the door, and a minute later he was on the sidewalk.

"I had to paint things in their rosier colors to get away from her," he said to himself. "I must own that affairs don't carry a roseate hue

just now, but we'll put them in that condition again before long. Despard must pay more attention to his grip hereafter."

Brandon who was still on the alert saw 'Roy walk away from the house.

He believed that by keeping track of the young man he would find Despard or Dodger Dick, and giving 'Roy a little start, he took his trail once more.

In the mean time, Dan Despard had made a discovery which astonished him as much as one of a similar nature had amazed 'Roy.

It was not long after the young man's visit to Bleecker street.

Despard went there himself, and ascended to the room on the second floor.

He unlocked the door and found the place empty.

The Dodger was gone!

The boy he had caught in Newspaper Square and conducted to Bleecker street where he had choked him into insensibility, had vanished like an autumn snowflake, and Despard was staring at an empty cot.

There was something startling in Dick's disappearance. It meant more than mere escape, and nobody knew this better than Despard.

"Thunder and guns! we've got to push things!" cried the villain, turning from the scene that maddened him. "The next time I'll know what my hands are doing. Merle Mallot has kept his agreement with Thalia, for the 'personal' is in the papers. We've got the nabob fairly in the trap. He is willing to buy the papers back for one hundred thousand, but that is only a beginning. Here, I have lost the wharf Norway, but it won't be for long. By Jupiter! it shall not be!"

Out he went, locking the door behind him, and going down-stairs like one mad.

"I think you've lost something, Mr. Despard," laughed a boy who saw the Gotham sport emerge from the house. The next time you'll clip the wings of the birds you catch. I thought mine were effectually clipped, but the transom was just wide enough to let me through. I like transoms o' that sort, for I've tried 'em before; but no thanks to you, Cap'n Dan."

When Despard walked off he was seen by the speaker who was our young detective, Dodger Dick, once more on deck and eager for action.

Despard led the boy some distance when he dodged into the cigar store in front of which Brandon had previously watched 'Roy, as we have seen.

"Headquarters, eh?" exclaimed the dock spy. "You're a cunning fox, Dan Despard, but if you don't watch, you'll lead me to the papers which Merle Mallot says must be back in his hands within twenty-four hours."

Let us follow the New York tiger.

The proprietor of the cigar store greeted him with a smile as he passed through and into a darkened room furnished with chairs and several tables.

Despard did not pause until he had passed up a flight of steps, and found himself on the third floor of the building.

A large and rather good-looking woman of forty met him, but not with any demonstrations of pleasure.

"I wish you'd let me out of this job," she said. "I don't like it."

"Getting squeamish?" laughed the city sport.

"I don't like it, I say," was the answer. "I have never kept jail before. Besides, I believe the police suspect something."

"Nonsense! They suspect nothing," exclaimed Despard. "You surround yourself with fears. You don't sleep of nights."

"That is true, and all on account of the person in there!" And the woman pointed toward a door near by. "I wish I had never agreed to take your prisoner. Take her somewhere else, Mr. Despard. Make some other person jailer; only relieve me!"

"You won't have to keep guard much longer," answered the sport.

"Ah! you're going to remove her, are you?" said the woman, her face brightening for a moment.

"Before long, Fanny."

"She is as bright as a button," continued the woman. "She takes her imprisonment good-naturedly sometimes, and talks a good deal. She's got a neat little sum laid up in one of the savings banks, all made out of her papers."

"Does she look for rescue?" asked Despard, eagerly.

"I think not very soon, though she says she has friends who will not desert her."

"Did she name them?"

"No."

"I believe I will go." And Despard walked

to the door, but stopped and turned to the woman.

"Perhaps she has retired," he said.

"Bless you, no!" was the exclamation. "She sits up late reading. Walk in." And Fanny opened the door.

Despard crossed the threshold of a medium-sized room, and at once saw its occupant in the soft light that pervaded it.

The next instant he was face to face with Newspaper Nell, the girl about whom a great many people were wondering, for she had been missed from her accustomed corner on the street.

Nell was seated near a little table engaged with a book; but when she saw the Gotham sport advancing from the entrance, she flushed and left her chair.

Fanny the jailer had shut the door, and the newspaper girl was alone with the chief of the golden league.

"You don't come often to see your prisoner, Mr. Despard," said Nell, with a sarcastic smile. "I am very comfortably situated here, though this is not Mrs. Hollystone's."

Despard was surprised at the girl's cheerfulness. He did not expect to find her in this mood.

"I am glad you take things so cleverly," he answered, hardly knowing how to meet her sally.

Nellie was silent for a moment.

"How goes the game?" she suddenly asked.

"What game, Nelly?"

"Oho! When did you become obtuse, Daniel Despard?" was the laughing rejoinder. "What game, is it? When did you last see your young partner, 'Roy Surface, and what does Merle Mallot offer for his lost documents?"

Despard was astonished at the girl's fund of information, and he did not at that moment think that she could have obtained it all during one visit to Dodger Dick.

"Why keep on the mask that hides nothing?" cried Newspaper Nell. "You play a very poor hand, Captain Despard. One of these days all your birds will be at large, and the game for gold will run out with you in the dregs."

A fierce light flashed up in the city tiger's eyes.

"You think yourself one of the birds destined for freedom, eh?" he cried, drawing close to the girl.

Her dark orbs laughed at him.

"By Jupiter! I take pleasure in telling you that my cages always hold!" he exclaimed. "Since you like your present quarters, you will retain them. The game is progressing favorably, Nelly. Ha, ha! I thought I'd drop in to see how you were getting along. Fanny is a good jailer, but you don't want to cross her, girl. You can't afford to do it," and Despard drew back and looked sternly at Nell.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DODGER IN A BAD BOX.

DESPARD soon afterward withdrew and left the newsgirl to herself. He had but one thing to worry him now, and that was the disappearance of the Dodger.

If he could find the boy and throw a new net over him, he would be in a position to command success, and be resolved to devote his time and energies to this purpose.

When he left the building through the cigar store he did not see Dodger Dick who was on the watch, and when he started off, he had the young ferret once more at his heels.

Dick had hopes of tracking Despard to his permanent lodgings which he thought were either in, or not far from, the Bowery.

The chief of the gold league headed straight for the latter place, and the young spy soon saw him strike the well-known street.

After a short chase Dick located Despard in a well-to-do building which he believed contained the man's rooms. If the villain lodged there, would not Merle Mallot's stolen documents be on the premises?

The Dodger did not quit the vicinity until Despard came out.

The man was permitted to go away without being followed. Dick had another object in view.

"Now for a little spying out of the land!" exclaimed the wharf spy, hastening up to the house. "I've had something to do with these Bowery houses in my time, and I know how to get at them. We'll see what this thing amounts to."

The first floor of the house from which Despard had just emerged was a notion store kept for the time by a florid woman of ample avoirdupois. When she saw the well-clad Dodger

cross the threshold, she came forward with agility for one so large, and waited for his order.

The Dodger was not very flush and there was nothing which he particularly needed, but he conciliated the Amazon by purchasing a paper of needles which he thought would suit Mother Sturgeon.

Then he began operations.

"Can you tell me anything about a gentleman who boards about here?" asked Dick.

"What's he like? We have nobody but gentlemen hereabouts."

"Of course not; that's why I called 'im one."

Then Dick proceeded to describe Despard. The woman's eyes twinkled near the close.

"The gent has rooms over us," she said. "I'm sure he has. He never has any dealings with us, but I see him once in awhile come and go. He isn't in now, for if I'm not mistaken, he went out just now."

"I wish I had seen him," exclaimed the boy, with an innocent air. "I'm always missing somebody. Who runs the house?"

"It's owned by a crippled man who never gets out. His wife, Mrs. Uphold, tends to the business. They're in the back-room on the second floor, but they're not likely to know much about the man you're looking after."

It was all the information Dodger Dick could get from the Amazon of the notion store, and he was compelled to withdraw.

One point had been gained.

He knew where Despard had regular lodgings, and that was something.

Dick hovered about the place the rest of the day, and when night came without bringing Despard back, he moved upon the house again.

This time he boldly but with stealth entered the hall. It was partly lighted.

"What is it, my young rat?" sung out a voice, and an angular woman of fifty, with sharp eyes and a peaked nose pounced upon him like a field hawk.

"You're Mrs. Uphold, eh?" answered Dick, recoiling from the clutch.

"That's just who I am, and I'll show you what it is to enter a respectable house where you don't board. Say, who are you, and what do you want?"

"Give a fellar time to get his breath, won't you?" replied the boy. "You've already frightened me out o' a year's growth."

"Then, come in as you ought to come."

Dodger Dick had dealt with all kinds of city characters, but he knew he needed all his wits to get ahead of the one he had encountered.

"Mebbe you'd like to lose your best boarder," he said boldly.

The woman seemed to lose what little color she had.

"You don't board here," she exclaimed.

"Right you are, madam, but my friend Despard does, and he doesn't allow his boys to be insulted by no landlady."

"Despard?" echoed Mrs. Uphold. "I don't know—"

"Don't know the gentleman with the keen eye and the black mustache?"

"Oh, Poynter!" ejaculated the woman.

"Yes, Poynter Despard," put in the boy quickly. "Well, I came here for him; he wants something that's in his room. Shall I go back and tell him that you stood like a lion between me and the door? I can if you say so."

"Why didn't Poynter come himself?"

"Business of importance," whispered the boy. "I guess I'll go back. You want to lose a boarder, I see."

"I do not, especially not one who pays like Poynter."

"Then let me get what he wants."

Mrs. Uphold drew back mollified.

"You know where he rooms," she went on. "Second door to the right on the next floor. If I had known you were his friend and here for him, of course I would not have stopped you. I will tell him so when he comes back."

"By Jove! I'll have to go back without carrying out his orders," suddenly cried Dick, who had thrust one hand into his pockets. "He forgot to give me the key. Of course he keeps his room locked. Confound it all! after the long trip, too, and on important business!"

The landlady of the house seemed to see a good chance to undo the evil she had wrought, and the next moment she produced a key and handed it to Dick, telling him to lock the door when he was through.

Dodger Dick bounded up-stairs, and disappeared.

"The second door to the right, wasn't it?" murmured the boy. "I will see what is beyond the portals."

He was promptly at the door which he unlocked with the key furnished by Mrs. Uphold.

A moment later he was in the tiger's den.

Locking the door behind him so as to keep out the prying eyes of the landlady, the Dodger went to work.

He was anxious to find the missing documents, for Merle Mallot had declared that they must be back in his hands within a few hours.

If the room held them Dick was resolved that they should be delivered up.

Despard was not very fashionable at home although he often appeared in dandy garb on the streets.

His room was not as clean as it might have been, and as the search proceeded, Dick discovered that the city tiger's den was like a great many others.

He went from place to place, searching each one carefully, now a closet, now a stand.

The papers did not turn up.

It was possible that Despard had transferred them to Thalia, but the Dodger did not believe that he would trust the woman that far.

The last object to be searched was the single bed which occupied the darkest corner of the room.

Dodger Dick approached it with fading hopes.

He ran his hands under the covers.

"Nothing!" he cried. "By Jericho! I guess I've struck an empty nest. Well, Captain Despard, you cannot say that you have not been searched."

Just as the boy was withdrawing his hand he was thrilled by a touch.

"Hello! what is this?" he exclaimed. "A package of papers, by all that's good!"

The next moment he held up before his dilated eyes a flat packet which looked like the article he was after.

Dick went to the light, breaking the wrapping tape as he did so.

Drawing one of the documents from the pack, he opened it and glanced over the writing.

"It looks valuable, but I'm no lawyer," he said to himself. "It appears to be what they call a legal document. Ah! here is Merle Mallot's name signed at the bottom. This is what I want!"

A second later a noise beyond the door startled the boy.

Then he heard a key fumbling about the lock on the door!

The Dodger started back, and thrust the packet into his bosom.

"What if Despard, the city tiger, was at the door!"

Dick knew that the portal could not be opened in the usual way, for he had left the key in the lock on the inside. It was fortunate that he had thought of this.

"Hey, there! Mrs. Uphold!" called a man's voice, which the Dodger with a thrill recognized as Despard's. "Who's been tinkering with my door?"

A moment's silence followed the words.

"Mebbe the boy you sent didn't lock it right," answered a voice, which Dick imagined came from the landing above.

"What boy? By heavens! I sent no boy here!" growled the New York sport.

"Why—indeed, Mr. Poynter, he said he came from you."

"When was he here?"

"About twenty minutes ago."

"And you let him into the room?"

"Yes. I—I—"

Despard swore like a mad hussar.

"Maybe he's on the inside now!" he exclaimed. "I won't pay a cent for the damage I do your door, Mrs. Uphold."

The woman uttered a cry of horror, and Dodger heard the man step back.

"I don't want to meet the tiger just now," he said.

The following minute he sprang to the back window, slipped the catch, and threw up the sash.

A glance into the night showed him nothing but darkness. He could not see what was below.

"It must be a drop," he sent through his teeth. "There's no other help for it now."

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW TURN IN THE GAME.

As the reader may suppose, the young detective of the docks did not wait long before he carried his hastily-formed plan into execution.

Indeed, he could not wait long.

Trusting himself to an unknown fortune, the

Dodger crept over the sill and lowered his body along the building.

All at once, crash! crash! and Dick loosened his hold and dropped.

Despard had thrown his body against the door, and it had yielded. The city tiger was in the room, but one second too late.

For a minute the sport stood bewildered in the middle of the apartment, and he did not at once see the open window.

Meanwhile, Dodger Dick had alighted on the roof of a low, back building, from whence he lowered himself to the ground without injury.

It was better luck than he had expected.

"I wasn't a second too soon!" exclaimed the Dodger, looking up at the open window. "If Despard had charged the door when he first reached it, I might not be here to laugh at his folly."

Dick ceased suddenly, for a face had appeared at the window, and the boy was forced to hug the dark wall which he touched.

Despard knew that his young foe had escaped him, but he did not believe it too late to effect a recapture.

"If the rat is in the yard I will get him," thought the Gotham sport, and he drew back from the window and vanished.

Now, if ever, was the Dodger's time.

He knew that the ground-room of the building was occupied by a notion-store, and he instantly resolved to gain the street through it.

He found a door which was unlocked, opened it and rushed into the place it revealed.

It proved to be a small storage-room, with light enough in it to show the little spotter another door leading into the main store.

Dick sprang forward.

All at once he appeared to a woman, who uttered a wild cry at sight of him. He knew her to be the proprietress of the establishment.

Dodger Dick did not wait to prove that he was no thief, but bounding down the room between the counters, he disappeared from the woman's gaze before she could catch her breath.

Once in the street, Dick considered himself safe.

He did not know what had become of Despard, and now, for the present, he did not care.

His only desire was to elude the New York tiger, and to reach a place where he could determine the value of the document he had recovered from the league against Merle Mallot.

Dick had several places where he could safely examine the papers, and he chose his occasional quarters under Mother Sturgeon's roof.

It was some time after his adventure when he reached the place, and in a small room, the door of which he had carefully locked, he began his task.

"Merle Mallot wouldn't like me to look at these papers," said the Dodger, to himself. "He wants them brought back without having been inspected. But since Newspaper Nell is somehow mixed up in Despard's game against the merchant, I feel that I have a right to see what is here."

The wharf spy was cunning, with no large amount of education.

He could read writing readily when it was not too bad, and could write a big blundering hand himself.

He found the papers, there were several, written in chirography rather hard to decipher, but in a little while he mastered it enough to be able to read it slowly.

"By Jericho! I must let Brandon see these!" he exclaimed. "There is something here that sets me a-thinking. What is all this about, giving somebody's property to a little girl, and appointing Merle Mallot executor and such? Here is the name of Mallot signed in a different hand from the other writing, and here is that of Nelson in still another hand. The girl mentioned all through these papers is Florette. Florette who? Ah! that is it! Great Caesar! I recall something just now. Nell once told me that she believed she was somebody else than Newspaper Nell. She once received a visit from an old man who asked her if she ever remembered Jerry Dunn, and when she said she did not, he laughed and said he could get a fortune for her if he dared. Nell did not take any stock in the old fellow, but he wrote something on a paper, which he told her to look at when he was gone. Nell did so, and found on the paper the three words—'You are Florette.' She threw the paper away, for she did not believe the old fellow, who seemed to be partly out of his head from the way he carried on. But now these papers appear to confirm the story. If Merle Mallot carried out his trust, why does he want these papers so badly? I can see some things with half an

eye, and when they are not as big as a caddy on the wharf. Despard and Thalia want a pile of money for these documents. They hold them over Merle Mallot's head, knowing that he will give half his fortune for them. I guess I'll pry into this thing a little. I'll see what has become of Nell, and then we'll look up Florette, and Jerry Dunn, too, if the old man is living."

The Dodger tied up the papers and was looking for a place of concealment when a knock sounded at the door. Mother Sturgeon was there.

"Dicky, there's a man in the hall asking after you," remarked the boy's foster-mother.

"What is he like?"

"He's a likely appearing young fellow."

"It is Brandon!" exclaimed the Dodger, and confident that he had hit upon the identity of his caller, he went to greet him in person.

Sure enough, the young man was Angus Brandon, and Dick's eyes got a glow of delight when he saw him.

Brandon was eager and excited.

"I've found you at last, and just when I was afraid I would have to give you up!" exclaimed Brandon. "I think I have made an important discovery."

"I know I have!" laughed Dick. "Come to my room, Mr. Brandon, and let me show you something."

Wondering what could be in store for him, the ex-clerk followed the Dodger, and had the papers placed in his hands.

"You have recovered them!" cried Brandon, his gaze alternating from the lost documents to the boy detective.

"It looks that way," smiled Dick.

During the next few minutes Brandon was absorbed in the papers. Dodger Dick watched him closely, and saw by his countenance that he was surprised.

When the young man raised his eyes at last, they encountered the gaze of the wharf spy.

"This is a secret which my uncle has scrupulously kept," he exclaimed. "I never heard of the existence of papers of this kind. I wonder how Despard and Thalia discovered them?"

"That, too, is a mystery," said the Dodger. "We can afford to pass it for the present, however. Who is Florette?"

Brandon shook his head.

"Can't you guess, Brandon?" exclaimed the boy. "Why is Nell missing? She fell into the hands of the league against Merle Mallot!"

Angus Brandon gave utterance to a startling cry.

"There! I see you have something new in your head," laughed Dick leaning forward with a rich sparkle in his eyes. "There is more in this hunt for Merle Mallot's burglar than you think. Now, what is the discovery you profess to have made?"

Brandon went on and detailed his espionage of Roy from the cigar store to the house on Tenth street, which Dick knew was the same place to which he had tracked Despard and Thalia.

"I saw at the window of that house after I lost Roy," continued Brandon, "the face of a young girl. It was wonderfully like Nell's."

"Can it be?" cried the Dodger. "Did you notice her particularly?"

"As closely as I could," was the reply.

"Do you think it was Nell?"

"I can only say that the resemblance was almost perfect. The person at the window was richly dressed."

"Nell in new plumage, may be!" exclaimed Dick. "Did she see you?"

"I cannot say. She drew back suddenly as if she thought she had been observed, and I saw her no more."

"You may have found a clew," said the Dodger after a little thought. "It is worth looking after anyhow. I am anxious to know what Despard will do now that he has lost the club he has been holding over Merle Mallot's head. The gang will not give up the fight. They have too much at stake. There will be a bold play. The woman, Thalia, the queen of New York black-mailers, will urge immediate action. We are at the most dangerous part of the game—dangerous for Nell, for all of us."

Brandon thought so, too.

Dodger Dick resolved on a visit forthwith to Merle Mallot, and not long after his conference with Brandon he found himself in the vicinity of the merchant's residence.

Two hours had elapsed since his adventure at Despard's lodging-house.

What had the tiger done? How had he taken his loss?

The Dodger could not repress a smile when he thought of Despard's discomfiture.

"Merle Mallot does not expect me at this time," murmured the boy. "He will be astounded at some of the inquiries I shall make. But the game has taken a new turn, and some entirely new hands must be played."

A moment later Dodger Dick reached the steps of the Mallot mansion.

The house in the daytime was shaded by trees, and at night the lamps near by darkened the place still more.

The Dodger mounted the steps with alacrity.

He was on the second one when a figure sprang from one of the trees, and straight at him.

It made no noise. When it landed behind the boy, there was no sound.

All at once, something like a shawl hovered over the Dodger's head, and then descended like a net of doom.

Dodger Dick uttered a muffled cry and tried to fight the horrid thing loose, but all in vain.

The sack, for sack it was, was drawn tighter, until the boy seemed to suffocate.

He was caught suddenly by a pair of arms and lifted from the step.

The tiger had recaptured his prey!

CHAPTER XVI.

DEATH COMES BETWEEN.

NOT a word was uttered as Dick was borne away toward the nearest corner, where a closed cab stood as if waiting for some one.

A man leaning against the vehicle started up as the captor appeared with his prey, and the door flew open.

The Dodger was thrust inside and the man sprang in after him; then the driver mounted to his seat, caught the lines with firm grip, and the vehicle rattled off.

All this occupied a very small space of time, and so adroitly was the deed perpetrated, that no person seemed the wiser for it.

About the same time, when the wharf spy was taking an involuntary ride through the streets of New York, a woman, whose face was veiled, mounted the steps of Merle Mallot's house.

She was alone at the time; but she had been accompanied to within a short distance of the mansion by a man.

Merle Mallot was up in his library.

He had received no response to the "personal" he had caused to be inserted in the papers, but was momentarily expecting one. When the bell rung, he listened for the servant's footsteps in the hall.

A short silence ensued, then the door opened.

The house servant had received full instructions from the merchant, and knew who to admit and who to exclude.

In a little while a light footstep greeted the waiting nabob, and Thalia stood before him.

"Have we kept you waiting for a reply?" asked the woman with a smile, as she came toward the merchant.

"Not long," was the response. "You saw the personal?"

"We saw it. It was full enough, and I am here."

She had taken a seat near the New Yorker, and her swift glance around the room was one of precaution.

"There are no eavesdroppers in my house," exclaimed Merle Mallot.

"It is a model house," smiled Thalia, and then she leaned forward, her deep dark eyes fixed on Mallot, and continued.

"We can't carry out our part of the trade just now on the terms proposed when I was here last."

Mallot gave a quick, nervous start.

"We want two hundred thousand dollars for the documents, one hundred thousand down to-night," she continued.

"The balance when?"

"When we deliver them in your hands."

The New York nabob took a long breath.

"You have raised the terms," he went on.

"We know exactly what the papers are worth."

"What would you say were I to tell you that I utterly refuse to give you a dollar?"

Thalia laughed.

"I would call you the fool of New York!" she exclaimed.

"Very well," said Mallot, as if through his teeth as he leaned back in his chair. "Not a dollar it is!"

The woman gave him a look of amazement.

Was he joking? If he was trying to bluff her, he would discover that he had opened the game on the wrong person.

Thalia kept her temper. She had not come to

Merle Mallot's house to lose it; there was too much at stake.

"You don't take me in earnest," resumed Mallot. "You think I am bluffing, but I was never more in earnest in my life. Shall I repeat my words, or did you comprehend them in full? Not a dollar for anything now in your hands!"

Coolly spoken as these words were, it cost Merle Mallot an effort to utter them.

It was the turn of the tide; his resistance to the city bleeders, and a sign of his trust in Dodger Dick.

Thalia looked at him several moments in silence.

She saw that he was in terrible earnest.

"Just as you please, Merle Mallot," she replied, putting forth a daintily gloved hand and resting it on the arm of her chair.

"You are the doctor in the case; we accept your decision. Shall we call the compromise at an end?"

She rose as she finished and stood in front of the merchant, her eyes gazing down upon him.

"Forge ahead!" he cried. "I expect you will open the ball now."

"We will explode a bomb that will shake the society in which you move," was the answer.

"We will produce Florette!"

"Is that all you can do?" laughed Mallot.

"No; let the second bomb speak for itself."

The city nabob was seen to lose color.

"We'll blanch your cheeks before assembled hundreds!" Thalia went on with the coolness of the practiced schemer. "We'll produce evidence stronger than Florette. We throw upon the tables where Justice sits evidences of a crime of which even suspicious and watchful New York knows nothing. Do you want me to intimate what we have in store for you, Merle Mallot? Do you want the fumes of a subtle poison to pervade the court-room? Shall we paint the death-struggles of a man who made you his executor to be mur—"

Merle Mallot threw up his hands with a cry of terrible agony.

Thalia came toward him with the leer of a beautiful demoness in her eyes.

"We can do this!" her voice sunk to a whisper which the merchant heard as plainly as if she had spoken in full voice. "Shall we do it, Merle Mallot? You have just dared us to our worst. We accept the challenge. We will listen to no compromise from this moment. Take the stroke of the thunderbolt when it falls. I wish you good-night."

Mallot did not appear to hear the parting words, nor did he seem to see the woman who walked from the room with triumph and threat imprinted on her countenance.

The door closed with a bang behind Thalia, and she left the house like a person in a storm.

"My God! they know everything! The boy cannot save me from this cyclone of vengeance!" came over Merle Mallot's lips as he left the chair and walked to the desk in the library.

He unlocked the lid and began to search the desk for a certain paper which was hard to find.

All at once he settled back in his chair with a bit of paper in his hand.

The burner was within his reach, and he held the paper in the flame until it was consumed.

"That is one secret the world never gets!" he exclaimed; then he went to the desk again.

One hour later when the house was still a door opened near Mallot's side and a beautiful young girl glided forward.

It was the merchant's daughter.

With her lustrous blue eyes fixed on the man in the chair she came forward.

The light of the burner fell full on Merle Mallot's face.

The girl noticed how ghastly it was and stopped. All color deserted her own soft skin.

After awhile, with an effort which summoned courage to her aid, she touched her father's arm.

He did not turn his head, though his eyes were wide open, staring at the open desk as it were.

Suddenly a wild cry rung through the house, and the girl tottered from the man in the chair, and dropped, a dead weight, on the floor!

The next moment doors opened on every side.

One person rushed to Merle Mallot, another picked the girl up, and bore her to the light.

The truth, the startling truth, was discovered then.

The girl had fainted, but Merle Mallot was dead!

Dead in his chair, with a few ashes on the floor at his feet, and forever safe from the threats and schemes of the gold gang!

It was some time before the daughter recovered sufficiently to speak.

She could only say that she found her father dead in the chair. She knew nothing else.

The servant who admitted Thalia remarked that she heard Merle Mallot moving about in the house after the woman's departure, so it was not murder.

There were no evidences of suicide, the family physician said, and intimated that a sudden attack of heart disease had broken the cord of life.

While the household was talking of the sudden death in whispers a man well dressed mounted the steps and was admitted.

In the parlor he suddenly found himself face to face with the physician, a lot of friends and the young daughter.

The scene astonished him.

He stopped short, and then fell back.

"Merciful God! that is the man!" screamed Merle Mallot's child, springing up and confronting the visitor with quivering finger. "He is the one, I say."

In an instant all was excitement.

The men left their seats, and the doctor appeared ready to throw himself upon the person in the doorway.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the stranger. "I have made a queer mistake. I am in the wrong house."

The next moment he was gone, and the shutting of the front door broke the silence that followed his departure.

"Something has happened to Merle Mallot," he muttered. "The girl claimed to recognize me. When did she ever see me in that house?"

"Was it heart disease, sir?" asked an excited young man who at that moment almost ran against the stranger on the lowest step.

"Who is dead?"

"Merle Mallot."

A strange, half muffled ejaculation burst from the caller's throat, and he sprang away like a startled deer.

"Do you know what has happened?" he exclaimed, bursting in upon two women in a handsome parlor some distance from the merchant's house.

"No!" they cried in the same breath. "In heaven's name out with it!"

"Well, Merle Mallot has gone to his account, and we've got to fight the girl now!"

Thalia's look became an ashen stare. Ione gasped for breath.

"I will never be rich!" the young girl cried.

"You shall!" exclaimed the man. "The battle will be easily won now. Merle Mallot's child can be beggared, and we will place you where she is."

"Do you say so, Captain Despard?" and Ione's face lit up with sudden joy. "Make me a queen of gold. I don't care how you effect it."

"It shall be done. Give me a little time," was the reply.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOUND AT LAST.

DODGER DICK had fallen into a trap when he did not think himself near anything of the kind.

Despard reasoned, and adroitly, too, that with the valuable documents in his possession, he would soon throw himself at the Mallot mansion, and he thought that the prize would be found on the boy's person.

When Dick found himself in the closed cab with the sack drawn tightly over his head, and the grip of Despard on his arm, he nearly gave up the game.

But it was for a moment only.

The vehicle made, to the boy, a long journey, and when it came to a halt he was lifted out and carried up two flights of steps.

Blindfolded by the bag, and continually gasping for breath he had no knowledge as to where he was, and when he was released, and the covering jerked from his head, a bright light for a moment dazed him.

"I'll take 'em, my young rat," explained Despard, advancing upon the young detective with a gleam of victory in his evil eyes. "You don't often catch me asleep, and I don't think you have to-night."

"You'll take what?" asked Dick, though he very well knew what the city tiger meant.

"The papers you robbed from me awhile ago."

"Oh!"

"Hand them over! Can't you see that the play is your last?"

The Dodger did not reply.

"Do you want to be searched?" roared Des-

pard, clinching his teeth. You got out of the Bleecker street house, heaven knows how; but there is no escape from this one. I want the documents. They are on your person. Hand them over."

"What a fellow does not have he can't deliver up," said Dick with a provoking smile.

Despard seemed to turn pale. "Do you mean to say you haven't them?" he cried.

"I do."

The next moment the Dodger was seized by the New York sport, and forced into a chair.

"You can't bluff Despard with a lie!" he went on. "The papers are in this room, and they shall become mine!"

With no gentle hands the wharf spy was subjected to a search which, to Despard's great chagrin, revealed nothing.

The man looked amazed.

"What did I tell you?" said Dick, with the semblance of a smile at his lips.

"You took them!" grated the sport.

"Prove it."

This was something which Despard could not positively do.

His landlady on the Bowery had admitted a boy to his rooms, and her description tallied exactly with the Dodger's appearance, but the evidence was circumstantial. Nobody had witnessed the act.

"You've put them away!" suddenly flashed Despard, drawing back a pace and looking fiercely at Dick. "If you don't give them up, by Jericho! you may never see the docks again."

"Proceed," smiled the Dodger. "If you think I'm the only person to overcome, Dan Despard, you're liable to find yourself mistaken. You want the papers, eh? Merle Mallot's documents, I believe."

"The ones you stole from my room!" was the response. "Do I understand you to mean that you won't reveal their hiding-place?"

"Suit yourself as to that," answered the boy.

"Confound you! I ought to pitch you through the window."

"I don't think you will do it, though, do you, Captain Despard?"

The Dodger knew he was too important a prisoner to be treated in this manner, and when he saw Despard walk toward the only door the room contained, he felt that the scene at the Bleecker street house was not to be re-enacted.

Despard unlocked the door, and turned madly on his little prisoner.

"When I come again, you want to be docile," he exclaimed. "We are not going to be beaten by cunning and silence. I give you a little time for reflection. Make the most of it, Dodger Dick, for more than one life is at stake in this game."

The boy detective made no answer, but saw the door shut behind the figure of the city sharp.

A key grated in the lock, and Despard's footsteps receded until they had died away.

Dodger Dick sprang from his chair, and went to one of the two windows of the room. A single look told him that he was a prisoner in a third story, for below he could see the lighted street and the buildings that lined it.

"Despard's cage is a lofty one this time," exclaimed Dick, while he looked. "I wonder where I am, and who my jailer is? The spider was waiting for me. He thought I would take the papers straight to Merle Mallot, but he was never more mistaken in his life. The strangest thing about this whole game is that I have been unable to obtain a definite clew to Newspaper Nell. The girl fell into Despard's hands—there is no doubt of that; but what has he done with her? Brandon will wonder what has befallen me if I don't join him soon. I must get out of here!"

Like a tiger in a cage the Dodger began to search diligently for a loop-hole of escape.

He inspected the transom over the door, but it was very narrow, and moreover could not be moved.

"Mebbe a fellow can pick the lock!" flashed across his brain, but he had no tools.

Already Despard had descended to the street.

"The rat won't get away this time!" he exclaimed. "He'll be willing to give up the papers when I draw the cords on him. Dodger Dick loves life like everybody else, and he will cling to it to the last. I guess I hold the best hand. Now, all I have to do is to keep it."

The young wharf spy had discovered that the one chair in the room had at some time been broken, but that it had been mended with a piece of heavy but pliable wire.

Here was a chance.

Bending all his energies to the task, he took off the wire and fashioned a part of it into a pe-

culiar looking instrument with which he approached the door.

For the next five minutes he was engaged on the lock. Again and again he changed the shape of the wire, and did not lose hope for a moment.

"I can afford to wear my key out on this lock," mentally exclaimed the boy. "If I can only get beyond this door, I'll make Despard and the gold gang wish they had never embarked in this play for a fortune."

Thirty minutes passed, and then Dodger Dick opened the door and looked into a darkened hall!

The task had been accomplished, and the rat of the docks had gnawed out of the trap.

The Dodger did not immediately leave the room.

He shut the door carefully and stepped back to collect his thoughts.

The house was strange to him. He would have to find his way through unknown corridors, and perhaps guarded ones, to the street.

When he moved forward it was with every sense on the alert, for he was yet in a bad box.

The boy closed the door behind him and locked it with the wire that had accomplished his liberation.

He stole on tip-toe down the corridor, but halted suddenly a few feet from his late prison.

A door had opened a few feet away, and a woman stood revealed to Dick.

"Now for it," murmured the boy, hugging the wall while he watched the woman like a hawk.

"Good-night!" said the person still at the door. "I won't mistreat you if I can't help you. I don't care what he says."

"Good-night," was the response, in a voice that thrilled the Dodger, and the door was shut and locked.

Fortunately for Dick, the woman did not inspect the corridor minutely as she came forward, and when he let slip a breath of relief she vanished.

"If I'm not mistaken, Captain Despard brought me to the right place!" he cried, waiting for the house to become quiet. "I would know the voice that replied to the woman if I heard it among a thousand. Nell is in there. I will bet my head on it, anyhow."

The following moment he was at the door he had just seen shut, and the improvised lock-picker was soon at work.

"What is that?" cried a young girl, turning toward the door from a stand in the center of the room beyond. "Fanny has not come back. Her key opens the door without difficulty."

She crossed the room and halted near the door where she listened almost breathless to the wire being manipulated in the lock.

All at once the noise ceased, and then the door opened in her face revealing the face of the Dodger.

"Not a word!" cried the boy leaping into the room, and clutching the girl's arm before she could frame an exclamation of astonishment. "We will outwit the Gotham gang, and win the game for others, Nelly. By Jupiter! I thought I'd strike the trail some time; but I never thought Despard himself would give me the clew."

How the eyes of Newspaper Nell scintillated in the light while the delighted Dodger spoke!

"Do you know the way down?" asked the boy.

"No. I was brought here blindfolded. I was caught and thrust into a carriage by Despard, who played his part of the game well."

"We'll get down," assured the wharf spy, firmly. "I've played against city sharps before this, and if Dan Despard or 'Roy Surface trip me any more, I'll throw up the sponge. Come, Nell."

The young couple left the room and found their way to a dark back stair which promised to afford them an avenue to freedom.

Not a word was spoken, and the flight was conducted with all the silence possible.

Fortune seemed anxious to favor Dick and Nell.

The second floor was reached in safety, and then the first.

"We must get to the street through the cigar store," whispered Dick. "Ah! there is some commotion out there. A building is on fire across the way. Jupiter! this is pot-luck, Nelly!"

The friends stood in the room in rear of the cigar shop, and waited a few moments.

Already the pavement outside was crowded with people, and the proprietor of the shop, Despard's tool, had left his station to see the fire.

"Come!" cried the Dodger, catching the girl's wrist. "We'll make the dash for freedom now." The next minute the pair stole through the room, sprung nimbly across the step and were lost in the crowd on the pavement.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DODGER'S TWO BIRDS.

THE reporters of the morning papers had written up their account of Merle Mallot's sudden death, and all had voiced the popular opinion that the ex-merchant had succumbed to an attack of heart-disease.

Nobody sought to find any clue to his death in the ashes of paper which lay at the foot of his chair, and no one knew the woman who was his last visitor.

The next day, and while the body of Merle Mallot lay in the darkened library, a nimble boy sprung up the steps and rung the bell.

The Dodger knew nothing of the sudden death, but when he saw the piece of crape fluttering from the knob, a strange thrill went to his heart.

"What has happened here?" asked the boy of the person who answered his ring.

"Mr. Mallot is dead."

Dodger Dick started.

"Dead?" he echoed.

"Dead," said the servant, solemnly.

"When—when did it happen?"

"Last night."

"By violence?"

"Heart disease."

At this juncture a footstep was heard in the hall, and a man came forward.

"Are you the boy who has been helping Mr. Mallot in a certain matter?" asked the man.

"I am Dick Sly."

"Then Miss Floss wants to see you."

Floss was the name of the merchant's only child, and the Dodger was led into her presence.

"They hounded him to the end," cried the young girl, coming toward Dick, with a white face, showing traces of recent tears. "Ah! if you had but come a little sooner!"

"I was here last night," and then the Dodger thought of his capture by Despard. "I mean to say I thought of coming," he corrected himself.

The girl laid her hand tenderly on his arm.

"A woman went away just before he died. She must have excited him terribly," Floss went on. "Father has been troubled much of late. I have heard him at midnight talking in his sleep, and only since he was robbed of his precious papers. He talked sometimes about one Florette, who cannot be the woman who came here last night. I don't like to take revenge, but somebody ought to suffer for the crime which has left me fatherless. The man who took the papers and the woman who was with him last are deep in some diabolical scheme."

"They are," cried Dick, unable to control himself. "The man is Despard, the woman Thalia. There is a third party, and a stool-pigeon for the three. You need not ask me to outwit them. I intend to do it. But, when all is settled and everybody have obtained their rights, you will not be as rich as your father's will has left you."

"I care not for that!" exclaimed the girl. "I never want to own that which is not mine. Those papers must be damaging things, for the gang wanted one hundred thousand for them."

"They don't get a cent for the lot!" answered Dick. "They will try to compromise with you. Remember, not a dollar for all they know or hold, Miss Floss!"

"If you say so, not a dollar!" replied the girl, firmly. "You saw the man who was here the night the papers went."

"Yes. He lifted his mask in the hall. I was at the top of the stairs. I have not dared to mention this till now. Last night he came back and I denounced him. He said he had entered the wrong house, and was gone before anybody could detain him. Stand me before this man and I will accuse him of the crime."

"It shall be done!" exclaimed Dick.

"And the papers?—what of them?"

"Let them speak for themselves after awhile."

If Dodger Dick had used his eyes, as perhaps he should have done when he left the mansion, he might have seen a man on the watch.

When the spy saw the Dodger, a cry of astonishment escaped him.

"By Jove! it cannot be, yet there he goes!" he cried. "Is this Fanny's work? She told me a short time ago that she was tired of playing jailer, but I did not think she would serve me this trick. The fox is out again."

A few minutes later the man, who was our old acquaintance Despard, appeared suddenly to a woman in a hallway above a certain cigar store near the Bowery.

"Traitor!" he hissed, ready to spring at her. "You've let the rat out of the trap!"

"What rat?" asked the woman, in the most innocent manner possible.

Despard was amazed.

"Thunder and guns! the one I brought in last night. Why do you try to play innocence, Fanny?"

"By my soul, I know nothing!"

Despard said nothing more, but sprung away and left the woman alone.

He rattled at the door of Nell's old cage; it was locked!

Fanny, coming up behind him, took her key and opened it.

The room was empty!

Then he went to Dodger Dick's prison, and, as a matter of course, found it in the same condition.

Fanny, the jailer, was a statue of astonishment.

"We'll have the police here next," she began.

"The cops be hanged!" roared Despard. "I'll have the birds back here or somewhere else before to-morrow night!"

"Not here!" spoke the woman, firmly. "I won't be that girl's jailer any more. I've had enough of it, Captain Despard."

The city crook drew back and looked at her with a fierce mien.

"You'd better turn saint!" he cried. "I'll send you a pair of wings!" And turning madly on his heel, out he went, leaving the woman to wish herself rid of him forever.

CHAPTER XIX.

FINISHED.

"ARE you ready, Brandon?"

"Ready and eager! This is my night of victory."

"It is if we succeed," and the Dodger smiled at his friend who had just walked with him from the house occupied by Mother Sturgeon.

Newspaper Nell had found a temporary home under the same roof, for it was not thought safe for her to go back to Mrs. Hollystone's where she could be found by Despard and his companions in the gold game.

The two, man and boy, proceeded to Police Headquarters on Mulberry street where Dodger Dick was attentively listened to by several officers, and when the boy had finished three men were detailed to make any arrests he thought proper.

The whole party took a cab for up-town; another vehicle of the same kind followed a short distance in the rear.

Arrived near the well-known house on Tenth street, the cabs stopped, the passengers got out.

Thalia's house was cautiously approached, and the bell rung.

When the door opened the police filed in with Dodger Dick at their head.

The wharf detective led them straight to the conspirator's room whose location he had correctly guessed from observations made on the street.

"Merciful heavens! the police!" rung out the voice of a young girl who fell back from the door she had just opened.

"Nonsense, Ione," cried another voice. "We don't let the cops in here—"

"No you don't, Thalia!" vociferated the Dodger, showing himself on the threshold.

"That woman yonder is Thalia, the queen of black-mailers. Mr. Brandon here fully identifies her. That is Ione, the girl who was to play a prominent part in the swoop upon Merle Mallot's riches. The others are not here."

Thalia and her beautiful young protegee stood spell-bound.

In the hands of the police!

"I always thought the scheme would fail!" suddenly exclaimed Ione. "This is the end of the whole business, and, instead of the carriage and the money I was to have, I shall go to prison."

"Hush! Wait till you hear the iron doors shut on you. Don't be a child!" And Thalia's eyes flashed as she looked ready to fly at her dupe and rend her to pieces. "These men can't hold us long."

But Ione was not reassured.

She walked toward Dodger Dick and stopped within a few feet of him while she looked him in the eye.

"I thought Captain Despard was going to fix you!" she cried.

"His traps would not hold the rat!" laughed the boy.

Ione walked back with a smile for Thalia.

"You see!" she said. "The vermin of the docks is the winner of the game."

The two prisoners were taken to the station where a charge of black-mail and conspiracy was placed against them.

Two of the police and the Dodger waited in the room for Despard.

An hour passed away, then another, and another.

Had the city tiger scented danger?

At last a footstep approached the door; it opened and in walked Despard!

The next instant he was covered by two revolvers, and found himself in the grip of the enemy.

"So you did it?" he cried, when he saw the smiling and triumphant face of Dodger Dick. "By Jove! I guess I deserve it all. I had two chances to wring your neck, and let 'em both slip. But, never mind. Another day, my dock Norway!"

The day mentioned never came for Dan Despard.

Roy was picked up by the police before sundown, and the whole league was safely caged.

At the trial that followed, Despard was convicted of burglary, on Floss Mallot's testimony, and got the full extent of the law.

Thalia was helped to prison by Brandon, whom she had repeatedly black-mailed, and Roy and Ione—the courts spared none—went up for having a hand in the big scheme.

Then it was that Merle Mallot's papers came home through the Dodger's hands, and the young girl saw that the Florette mentioned in them was Newspaper Nell, whom Mallot had defrauded out of her rights.

Floss was ready to make ample restitution, even to the house she inhabited, but Nell took only a modest share, and left her newspaper-stand to become the wife of Angus Brandon.

Dodger Dick's luck and pluck had followed him through the whole game, and when he was offered a handsome sum for his services, he took enough to make Mother Sturgeon comfortable, and remarked that he would go back to the wharf and wait for "another job."

"It's bound to come!" he cried. "I know it!—bound to come!"

THE END.

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